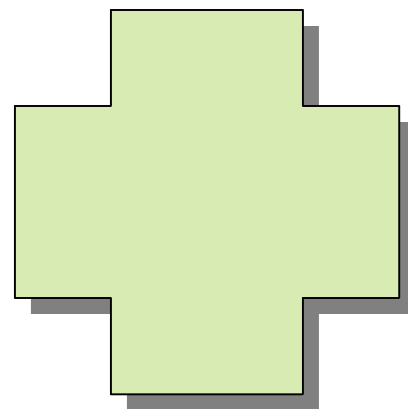




# ISABELLA

**A UNIQUE BOOK OF ITS KIND FOR COMPARATIVE STUDY OF  
ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY**

**By  
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## **About the Book**

Twisting the meaning of clear words of the true bibles has given a new shape to Christianity and has altogether changed it. These deliberate misinterpreted teachings of Moses and Christ prove that Christians and Jews have manipulated and thrust quite different wordings and meanings into their scriptures according to their whims. They have attributed strange and funny things to the Prophets which neither appeal to human understanding nor are fit to the dignity of the personality of a true Prophet.

The Holy Quran contradicts and rejects all such wrong notions. It manifests and contains the true teachings of all Prophets. It clarifies the position and status of Jesus Christ also, his lifting up alive to heaven, and his reappearance alive on some day before the Day of Judgment.

According to Muslim belief, Jesus, son of truthful Maryam, is one of the Prophets of Allah. It strongly opposes and rejects the wrong Christian belief that Jesus Christ was "Son of God."

In this book, Isabella, the learned author has made a successful attempt at clarifying the misleading ideas and teachings of Christianity. He has discussed various Christian beliefs, giving satisfying answers to the objections on Islam and the Holy Prophet. It is a useful treatise, in the form of a very interesting novel, on comparative study of Islam and Christianity.

Isabella, the main character of this book, is a seeker after truth. Her sincere attempt at acquiring knowledge to accept truth and justice leave everlasting effect upon the reader's mind. A strict Christian girl, the daughter of a strict, orthodox and begot Christian, the chief priest of Cordova, she ultimately discovers Islam to be the only soul-satisfying way of life. She lived for Islam and died for Islam.

## **In A Luscious Garden**

In a famous garden of Spain, well known for its beauty and freshness vying with the garden of Eden, which was always crowded by sight-seers, two learned men were engaged in a theological discussion in a corner. The sun at this time had completed its round and was preparing to set in the west; while the enchanting songs of birds returning to nests were exhilarating the passers-by. A Christian girl, whose name is given in history as Isabella, was also sitting with some friends in the garden and watching with delight the beauty of Nature. Aged about sixteen or seventeen she was the daughter of a Christian priest. In her "beauty and grace she looked like a hourie of Paradise, and nobles and religious leaders aspired for her hand to make their lives happy and joyful, but her father wanted her to be the model of virgin Mary and did not want to give her away in marriage. Since she was being given religious training, she was well acquainted with religious matters and took keen interest in theological discussions.

In a bed of roses, in a corner, as stated above, sat some Muslims, who appeared to be men of learning, engaged in some discussion.

First man: Saint Paul has written in one of his letters[ Epistle to the Galatians, 3 : 10] that religious law is a curse and Jesus Christ came to relieve us from that curse. What after all does this mean?

Second man (laughing): You want to understand it from me, although even Christian priests... . . .

Isabella, who was sitting at a little distance with her girl friends was alerted on the words "even Christian priests" and said to one of her friends: These Muslims seem to be talking about our religion. Let us hear quietly what they say. A friend responded: Since these Muslims have come here our religion is in great danger.

Isabella: Stop talking. Keep quiet and let us hear what they say.

First man: Muaz! You have said that even Christian priests do not understand it. Do you mean to say that they are following Christianity without understanding it?

Second man: Umar Lahmi! Just put this question to some eminent priest and see what he says. But first you' should tell me your Objection to what Saint Paul has said.

Umar Lahmi: There is no objection in fact. I Just want to understand it and since you have often talked to Christians and have also read their literature, so I want to understand it from you. What I want to know is that when religious law is a curse and Prophet Jesus came to relieve the Christians from this curse, therefore, theft, fornication, disobedience to parents will also be permissible although no Christian believes in their permissibility.

Muaz: How are theft and fornication and other such sins related to the religious law being a curse? I cannot quite follow you.

Umar Lahmi: What I mean is that the Old Testament is the religious law which enjoins that . one should not steal, should not fornicate, should not give trouble to his neighbour, should not disobey his parents, etc. But when the entire religious law is a curse, it will also be a curse to obey these injunctions as these injunctions are also religious law and the very core of it. If what Saint Paul says is correct, then Christians should also steal, fornicate and commit such other sins. But like us they follow this religious law, then they are accursed and Christians who object to these sins are condemned as they object to obedience of religious law.

Muaz : Funny, you want me to clear the very objection which I have put to Christians so often.

Umar Lahmi: Have you ever put it to Christians? What was their reply?

Muaz: They tried to explain it away and were perplexed.

Just then there was the call for the Maghrib prayer and the two learned men made their ablution in a nearby tank and offered prayer

Isabella had listened to this conversation very attentively being keenly interested in theological questions and felt the weight of the objection. She put her mind to it and tried to find out an explanation that she might put it to Muaz and Umar Lahmi. But despite all efforts she was unable to find a solution and, still absorbed in the question, she got up along with her friends thinking that she would ask her father about it.

Isabella left her companions at a crossroad and walked to the eastern gate of Cordova.

## **An Important Question**

Entering the eastern gate of Cordova the young and beautiful Isabella took to the road which led straight to the Qasrul Shuhada (Palace of Martyrs). The Muslim government of the day had lavishly beautified the whole of Spain. The roads of Cordova were wide and well planned and beautiful lamps at short distances lighted them and, as Dr Draper says, one could walk twenty miles in their light. Isabella walked slowly and gracefully on the wide and bright road of the Palace of Martyrs towards her home and her pace today was thoughtful and dignified. After her evening stroll she used to call on her friends on the way while returning, but today she was heading straight to her home and seemed to be absorbed in some thought. In half an hour she reached her palatial house, where her maidservant was waiting for her at the door and greeted her. Giving some off-hand answer to the maid's question as to her delayed return; she entered her room and, sitting in an easy chair, began to read a book. In the meantime the maidservant laid the dinner table and called her. But she was so absorbed in the book that she did not respond and continued in her study. The book she was reading was the Holy Bible and she was particularly studying Saint Paul's Epistles with great care in which the religious law was denounced as a curse. She read the letters again and again but could not find a solution to her doubt, which became more and more firm as she went on reading. When her mind was tired she put away the Bible and resolved to ask her father who, she thought, could explain it.

She did not think that the problem was insoluble. If she could not find the solution, her father would easily find it as there was no man in Spain so learned as her father. So eased in her mind she took her dinner and began to read the Bible again. Sometime after she went to her bed.

Next morning rising early she went to the church, it being a Sunday. On her return her father called her and asked her what chapter of the Bible she had read last night as she was engaged in comprehending the inner meanings of metaphysics. If she had any difficulty in solving any problem she might ask him.

Isabella (kissing his hand): Father, I have read today 1 John, Chapter 3, and if you permit me I may ask a question as I have not yet been able to solve the problem.

Priest: Surely, surely, my child. Do ask it and I will resolve your difficulty.

Isabella: Our Lord has given us Twelve Commandments in the Old Testament through Prophet Moses. Are they not about religious law?

Priest: Yes, they all relate to religious law.

Isabella: The next thing is that Saint Paul has said in one of his letters that religious law is a curse.

Priest: Yes, religious law is a curse and it was to relieve us from this curse that Jesus Christ came to the world and was crucified.

Isabella: It is clear that religious law is a curse and so grave a curse that Jesus Christ came to the world to remove it and was crucified. It, therefore, means that to follow religious law is also a curse.

Priest: Surely it is a curse and now Christians, instead of following the religious law, should have faith in Jesus Christ, as religious law was effective until our lord was not crucified.

Isabella: Now, is stealing permissible for us?

Priest: What has this got to do with the religious law? My child, you should think carefully before asking a question as anyone else who bears this question will take you to be quite foolish.

Isabella: Forgive me. Probably I could not make myself clear. What I mean is that among the Commandments, which you have just said are part of religious law, one command is that you should not steal and another that you should not oppress your neighbour and the third that you should not disobey your parents. Now, these commandments are still parts of the religious law which, according to Saint Paul, is a curse. So to obey the Commandments of Old Testament (that is not to steal, not to fornicate) is abomination and not to steal and not to molest your parents are a curse.

Priest: My child, you have not yet understood the position of the religious law. But, first tell me who put this foolish question in your mind and what devil put this doubt in you?

On this Isabella reported all the talk between Umar Lahmi and Muaz which she had heard in the garden.

Priest: My child, you know it well that these accursed Muslims are "unbelievers" and have always been inimical to our sacred religion. Criticism of our holy books is the result of satanic thinking. My child, you should repent at once and in future do not give ear to the talk of Muslims. They are irreligious and castigate the true religion of others. Do you know, my child, what is their religion? Bloodshed is creditable in their religion. Just see, they invaded our country Spain and killed hundreds of innocent people and are forcibly imposing their religion. Now, I know that these objections you have heard from Muslims. If they were from your own mind I would have cleared them, but what reply can we give to them?

Isabella was sorry to have mentioned Muslims; otherwise her problems must have been solved. Now I will ask this question, she thought, from my teacher whom I ask questions which I do not understand in the course of my studies.

Next day Isabella put the same question to her teacher who also failed to satisfy her by some convincing answer. Up to this time Isabella had thought that her difficulty was due to her lack of understanding and the religious leader will solve it easily, but now she realised that it was not an easy but an important matter and her doubts were strengthened and continued to grow.

## **A Letter**

A few days later, Isabella again went in the evening to the same garden where she had heard the conversation of two Muslim divines. Soon after she had taken her seat, Umar Lahmi and Muaz also arrived and began to talk on different subjects.

Umar Lahmi: I have heard a curious and interesting report today.

Muaz (surprised): What is it?

Umar Lahmi: The objection, that you raised on a passage of Saint Paul's Epistle the other day, has reached the ear of the Head Priest and there is a great commotion among the priests on account of it. It is also said that some sensible persons have even become sceptics.

Muaz: Well, this seems to be mere gossip. Who could have heard our talk that day?

Umar Lahmi: Who could have heard our talk? Is it for nothing that the priests have become so agitated?

Muaz: After all what is the cause of the commotion? Have the priests heard our objection for the first time?

Umar Lahmi: The reason I cannot tell myself, but what I have heard and why the priests have become agitated is just for our objection. Several meetings have been held among the priests to find a solution. The report has reached me through Christian sources.

Muaz: Just one objection has created commotion among the priests. All beliefs of Christians are ridiculous. While sin was committed by Adam punishment was given to all and the entire humanity became sinful. And has this belief any justification that in retaliation of the sins of all the sinners, an innocent person is punished and, to bear the burden of all the sins, "the son of God" comes to earth and is crucified. Is it not the very limit to make Divinity a weak and powerless person? If Christians have any answer to all these questions, let them come forward and explain.

Umar Lahmi (laughing): If it is not Christians who can go to that limit of absurdity, who else can do this? Everyone can talk reasonably, but there should be someone to talk nonsense.

Muaz: I think it is time that we exploit this Commotion.

Umar Lahmi: It is a very good suggestion and at this time let us publish a poster in which we should recount all the absurdities of the Christian belief.

Muaz: This is quite good and it will create a commotion among Christians all over Spain. Isabella and her two classmates sitting in a corner of the garden- were listening



attentively to this talk and were cracking their fingers in anger. At last Isabella lost her patience and said to her companion; We must refute their allegations and do everything to convince them. May our Lord Christ attract them to his side! If these Muslims can be converted it will be such a great victory for Christianity that henceforth Muslims will never be able to raise their heads in this country. And Isabella raised her head to the heaven and earnestly prayed to God to bring these "unbelievers" and enemies of Christianity to the Christian fold that "Thy Greatness is manifested."

A companion: Sister Isabella.' These "unbelievers" are very hot-headed. How can they give up Satan and take the hand of Lord Christ? But the trouble is that our priests are also afraid of these Muslims. It was just yesterday that, on seeing your worry about the objection about our religious law and curse, I put it to the priest of our parish who ignored it saying that we should pay no attention to what these Muslims say. Their answer is not discussion but the drawn sword. When such is the condition of our priests, why should the Muslims not become arrogant?

Isabella: The thing is that our priests do not like to talk to these "unbelievers" and keep quiet. But their silence does not mean that they cannot solve their problems. Yet if they are assured that after being convinced most of the Muslims will be ready to embrace Christianity, they will face them most willingly.

The companion: Written promises may be taken from these Muslims and they should be made to talk face to face with our priests, so that on the one side our Christian divines are forced to talk to them and these Muslims are forced to embrace our faith.

Isabella: This is quite good. But will these Muslims be ready for it?

The companion: Why not, what have you just heard from their own lips?

Isabella: Then why to wait? Inform them just here that they should be prepared to discuss with our priests. I am giving you a chit which you may take to them and see what they reply.

The companion: But first ascertain from our divines. These "unbelievers" may be ready, and our divines may not agree.

Isabella: If these people give a written undertaking that on being convinced they will embrace Christianity; our divines will certainly have a dialogue with them.

Isabella then wrote out the note: "Please pardon me. I overheard your talk very attentively and since we are also interested in theological questions I hope you will not mind my intrusion. You have just told your companion that if Christians satisfactorily explained relation between religious law and curse you will embrace Christianity and you also want to challenge Christians on religious law and curse, so, as servants of our Lord Jesus Christ, we gladly accept your challenge, provided you give a written undertaking of it.— A Humble Servant of Christian Faith."

Her companion handed over this chit to Umar Lahmi who immediately showed it to Muaz and promptly wrote the answer: "We thank you for the trouble and we agree that if your elders explain to us the dilemma of religious law and curse, we assure you that I myself and my associates will embrace Christianity. Now say where and when we should come to discuss —A Humble Servant of Islam, Umar Lahmi."

Isabella on reading this replied: "About time and place I will I come tomorrow and let you know.—A Servant."

Coming' out of the garden of Cordova Isabella's first concern was to find out a learned man for dialogue with the Muslims and so, before going home, she went to her kind teacher and told him all that had happened. The teacher who was himself a priest and well versed in religious problems, on seeing Isabella's worry, snubbed her and asked her if it was such a serious matter as to cause her worry. Isabella then showed him the note which Umar Lahmi had given her in the garden that evening and in which there was an undertaking that if this problem was solved, he along with his associates will accept Christianity. On this the teacher agreed to take up the matter and felt the need of some eminent scholars. He pacified the anxiety of Isabella and had her leave to depart saying that he would fix up the time by noon next day. Isabella spent a restless night and the question continued to haunt her -what was going to happen the next day, for if her learned men were unable to satisfy Muslims then Christians will be browbeaten for ever. At last morning came and, after finishing her toilet, she began to study the Bible. Just at noon she took with her two of her friends and repaired to the house of the priest where she found a large number of priests gathered, waiting for someone on whose arrival the chair was offered to him; Isabella's teacher, after the praise of Jesus Christ, explained the object of the gathering and earnestly requested the scholars to take courage and prepare for a dialogue with the Muslims trying to convert them to Christianity.

One priest: We wondered what was the grave problem for which we had been asked to meet together. On reaching here I found that it was a simple affair. Just call these Muslims even now and any one of us will convince them.

Another priest: It is true that the matter is not very grave as we often hold discussions with the Muslims. But since the news has gone out that Christians have no answer to the objection of Muslims, the issue has assumed importance and now we should fix time for the discussion.

A person: Tomorrow is Sunday and all Christians will gather in the great church, so Muslims should be called there tomorrow, and may Lord Jesus give them guidance.

A priest: This is a good suggestion. (Then addressing Isabella :) Your respected father who leads prayer in that church should be present as possibly we may need his help at some stage since you are the intermediary for this talk between us and the Muslims.

Another person: Her father is the Head Priest of all Spain and there is no one else more learned in the problems of Christianity than he, and therefore his presence is essential.

Michael (Isabella's teacher): Surely, surely.

So the proposal was unanimously adopted and Sunday was fixed for the dialogue. At Isabella's request Michael wrote out a permit for Umar Lahmi to enter the church.

Now it was just one and a half or two hours for the sun to set. Isabella prepared herself to go to the garden when her other two companions also arrived and they slowly walked towards the garden where they found Umar Lahmi and Muaz already sitting and, unlike other days, some other people were also with them. Isabella herself handed over Michael's letter to Muaz which was opened and read by everyone.

Muaz (to Isabella): We are very thankful for all your painstaking and if either of the parties gets guidance the credit of it will first go to you.

Umar Lahmi (to his companions): She is a scholar of Christian philosophy and well learned in theology. How praiseworthy is her zeal to try to take us out from "disbelief"!

Isabella: I am a humble servant of Jesus Christ and thank you for accepting the invitation.

One Muslim. Allah forbid! Just see how Christians assign partners to Allah and deify Christ. Surely, they are out of their senses, otherwise how can a living man. ...

Umar Lahmi: You have already entered into controversy. It has to be decided tomorrow at the great church. (To Isabella :) You may assure the priests on our behalf that we shall certainly come to the church just after breakfast.

Isabella immediately left with her companions and did no longer stay at the garden as she used to do for she had to make arrangements and hold consultations for the next day's gathering.

## **The First Meeting**

Isabella having left, Umar Lahmi and Muaz went to their houses and began to study the Holy Qur'aan and the Bible and noted down important points to be discussed. Next morning on Sunday the news of this discussion was known all over the city. The Christians had made arrangements that only a few Muslims should be allowed to enter the church. So many Muslims had to return disappointed. Umar Lahmi, Muaz and some Muslim divines came to the church and entered it on getting permission. They found eminent priests of Cordova present there busy in their worship. After some time, however, the discussion began. Isabella and all her companions were present.

Michael (Isabella's teacher): We have learnt that you have some doubts about Christianity and have come here to resolve them and that you have promised that on getting convincing reply you will forsake Islam and adopt Christianity.

Umar Lahmi: We have not the least doubt about Christian beliefs and teachings but are fully convinced that doubts are baseless. But if you satisfy us and convincingly explain your beliefs we are all certainly ready to become Christians.

Then Michael reckoned to an elderly man to take up the discussion. He came forward and sat near Umar Lahmi. His name was Peter and he was known as an expert in Arabic learning and Islamic literature and had to his credit many books against Islam. He was supposed to be the most efficient debater against Muslims. He addressed Umar.

Peter (in a superior, rather commanding, tone): I am told that your great objection is why Saint Paul has called religious law a curse. But this is a minor and side issue. You are Muslims and believe in the Qur'aan and, therefore, the decision about Lord Jesus Christ and Christianity should be according to the Qur'aan.

Umar Lahmi: I had clearly defined the subject of discussion in my letter as you yourself admit, but now you want to discuss other matters. When I have written that the discussion should be on the religious law and curse, what objection can you have?

Peter: We will answer your question also but first let us deal with the basic issue and that too from your Qur'aan. Does not your Qur'an say about our Lord Jesus to be Ruhullah (the spirit of God), Kalimatullah (the word of God)? Has it not been mentioned in it that he used to bring the dead to life ? Then if you believe in the Qur'an, how can you doubt Lord Jesus being the son of God ?

Umar Lahmi: You have started quite a different discussion which is not even remotely concerned with our object. What I want is to understand the significance of religious law and the curse. If you are prepared to discuss it, then do it, otherwise let us take leave.

Peter: I put up the Qur'an before you and want that the basic issue should be decided first. If you want to avoid the basic question and enter into side issues, it means that you have no answer to it.

Umar Lahmi: Well, you want to discuss the basic issue apart from your religion and taking the cover of the Qur'an. If you want to discuss the basic issue, let us first decide whether Adam did commit a sin and if it is decided that he did, then we should discuss whether it passed on from generation to generation to the entire humanity, that is on account of Adam's sin all human beings became naturally sinners. If this has happened, we will discuss how the blot of sin can be removed. Then we may discuss the chastity of Prophet Jesus (according to the Bible). Thereafter you shall have to prove that Jesus was God and he only can absolve humanity of sin. When all this is proved, you shall have to prove that Jesus was crucified and for all the sins he remained in Hell for three days. This is to be discussed and not what the Qur'an says about him.

Peter: All this is irrelevant. What I want is to prove from the Qur'an that Jesus was the "Spirit of God" and the "Word of God" and he brought the dead to life. Therefore Christian religion is just.

Umar Lahmi (pointing to Isabella): Now I appoint her the judge and ask her why we were called here. (To Isabella :) Sister, you have to say now what I wrote in my letter and why you brought us here.

Isabella: In fact the real talk was as to whether religious law is a curse or not. If it is a curse, why do the Christians by following it become accursed? But the objection of our holy father (Peter) is also justified and my judgment is that first your objection should be met and then the Holy Father may put questions on the Qur'an.

Umar Lahmi: This is for me to leave the ground open for you. Now, I give you the promise that when you have dealt with our objection we will immediately allow you to put general questions. But when, as I have promised, I embrace Christianity, what need then there will be of any further questions?

Peter: Well, sir, then you state your question clearly.

Umar Lahmi: You go on replying each of my questions one by one and the matter will be clear. First, let me know whether not to steal, not to kill, not to oppress the neighbour, etc., are religious commandments and whether they are concerned with religious law.

Peter: Surely, all these are related to the religious law.

Umar Lahmi: And what is Saint Paul's decree about religious law ?

Peter: What decree? I do not follow.

Umar Lahmi: You do understand it well, but you want to evade answer. Just say if Saint Paul has called religious law a curse.

Peter: Saint Paul has called religious law a curse in this respect that the core of religious law came in the form of Jesus Christ and it is a folly to leave the core and run after the skin.

Umar Lahmi: This is what I also mean that Saint Paul, taking Jesus as the soul and religious law as the body, has called religious law a curse, and since, as you said, this Commandment of Old Testament is related to religious law, there-fore to refrain from killing and fornication is also a curse.

Peter: The thing is that you cannot understand these mysteries without the help of the "Holy Ghost" and it is not necessary that a matter which you cannot understand is in fact wrong. Saint Paul has called physical religious law a curse and not all kinds of religious law.

Umar Lahmi: Agreed. Granted that Saint Paul has called physical religious law a curse. Now just tell me if not to steal, not to fornicate, not to oppress parents, etc., are physical religious law or simply internal, spiritual and moral.

Peter: You are hitting on the same topic. Just listen. What Jesus Christ has said is more preferable to what Saint Paul has said and our Lord has asked us to follow the Commandments of the Old Testament.[See Bible, Matthew, S : 19 to 10: 25.]

Umar Lahmi: That is, to obtain salvation it is necessary to follow the Old Testament. If this is so, why did you raise the problem of Atonement by crucifying the "Son of God"? Why this bogle of Atonement when it is necessary to follow the Old Testament? Is it necessary to follow the Commandments of the Old Testament even after the Atonement of Christ ?

Peter: We know nothing except that our Lord has directed us to follow the Old Testament. But salvation cannot be gained by merely following the Old Testament without Atonement.

Umar Lahmi: So Prophet Moses (Musa), David (Dawud), Solomon (Sulaiman), Joseph (Yusuf), Noah (Nooh) and other prophets must have been deprived of salvation, for their means of salvation was just following of the religious law. So also must their communities have been deprived.

Peter: Before the advent of Christ the only means of salvation was following the religious law, but the Lord's Atonement changed it and now the only means is Atonement.

Umar Lahmi: First you rejected what Saint Paul had said that religious law was not a curse and then you rejected religious law as the basis of salvation. Can you quote any saint to prove that Saint Paul's saying that religious law is a curse is not true?

A person: Gentlemen, in fact it is apostasy and disbelief to talk of these matters. All these elate to unseen mysteries. Saint Paul has certainly called religious law a curse and it is

really so, but you people are unable to understand these mysteries. Our means of salvation is the divinity of Christ and Atonement, because Jesus was free from sins and an embodiment of God, who by his grace and benevolence suffered on the cross in lieu of us and gave us salvation.

Another person: Do not indulge in mutual quarrels. You have begun to refute Saint Paul.

Umar Lahmi: This is the result of untrue and baseless talks. Now, this other gentleman has broached the- subject of Divinity and Atonement. First let the discussion of religious law and curse be concluded.

Peter: You have been given a conclusive reply. Now you may take eight days to ponder on the matter. If your doubts are not resolved during this time, you may come here again.

Umar Lahmi: You do not regard religious law a curse and your colleague says it is a curse and Saint Paul was correct. Which of you two is on the right?

Peter: Those who say this are not acquainted with the mysteries of Christian religion. You should not attend to what they say.

Umar Lahmi (to Isabella): Now, you say which of them is on the right and whether Saint Paul was wrong in calling religious law a curse. Isabella: I came here to listen to your discussion and cannot intervene in any matter. But I will request my teacher Michael to resolve this question by his great learning and intelligence, since, apart from our honoured guests, I myself have not yet understood it.

These words of Isabella fell like a bolt from the blue on the entire assembly and everyone began to look askance at one another. Just then Michael got up.

Michael: Brethren, we have assembled here to search faith and it is certainly a very auspicious task. But for it, it is necessary that there should be a sincere heart and an urge to accept the truth. The question of faith is such that no one can succeed by his own effort without Divine help. We should, therefore, earnestly pray to God that He should manifest the truth to us through the help of the "Holy Ghost" and reveal to us the mysteries of the Christian faith. (Loud cries of Amen from all Christians.)

Gentlemen, whether religious law is a curse or not is an irrelevant question. The real thing is that our Mohammedan brethren have no knowledge of Christian creed and principles and so they are indulging in polemics. The essence of our religion can be stated just in two words, i.e. the Divinity of Christ and Atonement. One who has understood these two has understood all the secrets of the Christian faith.

How gracious is God that He sent His only son for our salvation to suffer all the troubles of this world and then at last he was killed on the cross as an atonement for our sins. So I will request my friend Umar Lahmi and his associates to give up the useless discussion of religious law and curse and think of the holy personality of our Lord Jesus and his matchless atonement and embrace Christian faith.

Umar Lahmi: We have not come here for mere talk. We follow a principle and want to discuss basic problems. We have already defined the subject of our talk in my note, whose witness is our sister Isabella here. Now, if you want us to give up the real subject-matter and discuss the Divinity of Christ and Atonement, I am ready for that also, provided you give me in writing that we give up the subject of religious law and should talk on the Divinity of Christ and Atonement.

Peter: We do not mean to say that you should not discuss these problems, but that we may leave aside marginal issues and discuss basic problems.

Umar Lahmi: Then why did you call us here? Churches and mosques are not necessary for discussion. If you do not want to discuss, then say so clearly so that our time is not wasted.

Michael: You have misunderstood holy Peter's talk. He did not mean that we should close the dialogue altogether. He only wanted to stress that you should put questions by thinking over the basic problem. But it is already noon and you may have to take lunch. Say when it will be convenient for you to come again.

Umar Lahmi: This time is very convenient. No one can say whether we shall have this auspicious occasion again.

Michael: But you have also to offer your prayer.

Umar Lahmi: We can offer our prayer in this very church.

Peter: I think we better take up the discussion again next Sunday.

Umar Lahmi: I think the discussion should not be put off for so long. Possibly we may be guided by Allah.

Michael: All right, we restart the discussion tomorrow at this time and continue till midday.

Isabella: If the discussion to be put off for tomorrow, then it should not end at noon but continue till the evening so that we may come to some conclusion.

Michael: Not at all, have we no other business?

Isabella: I think, no other business can be more important than this.

It was, however, decided that the discussion should begin in the morning and continue till noon.



This concluded the first meeting. Umar Lahmi, thanking all Christians, leaves for his home while the priests and Isabella remain sitting in the church.

One priest: It is regrettable that you gave the opportunity to these "unbelievers" to raise objections and let the Christian faith be ridiculed. The only way to treat these heathens is to put the Qur'an before them. Holy Peter did this in the very beginning but, unfortunately, they cleverly wriggled out and took up the discussion of religious law. If the same is done tomorrow also, we will be badly let down, because what they enquire about is of the Divine secrets which no one except saints can understand.

Michael: In fact, the discussion went into wrong channels in the very beginning, otherwise they would have been let down by their own Qur'an. Does not the Qur'an say that our Lord Jesus is the "life-giver" and brings the dead to life? Does not the Qur'an call him the "Spirit of God" and the "Word of God"?

Peter: But, now, the subject of discussion for tomorrow has been defined. It will be on the Divinity of Christ and Atonement. See how cleverly I wanted them to divert from it, but Michael put them again on it.

Michael: Do not blame me. It is all your handiwork.

Another priest: What is the use of indulging in mutual quarrels. It will be seen tomorrow, when Divinity of the Lord will come under discussion that our Christian religion is not a soft morsel which anyone can swallow at a gulp.

After this conversation all the Christians left the church and dispersed. Isabella also left with her companions and made for her home. On her way she spoke to her companions.

Isabella: Just see, behind the back of Muslims they boast that Muslims cannot stand before them, but when they were faced with Muslims they were thoroughly exposed. I am sorry that my father had to leave immediately after leading the prayer as he had full confidence in the ability and learning of Michael and Peter, otherwise he would have silenced these Muslims.

One companion: In fact, the problem is a bit too tough. What even your father could have done ?

Another companion: In fact, our beliefs and dogmas are poor. Otherwise our priests would not have been so beaten.

Isabella: God forbid ! Just a single discussion has upset you. Our beliefs are certainly well founded, but there should be someone to explain them. Now, tomorrow the Divinity of Christ will be discussed and you will see how badly they will fare.

They had now reached a crossroad where all the girls turned towards their respective homes.

## **The Second Meeting**

On Monday the priests began to assemble in the great church. Many Christian women also came with Isabella to hear the discussion. A little later Umar Lahmi, Muaz and some other Muslim divines also arrived and the priests were perturbed on seeing them and they began whispered conversation among them. Just then Umar Lahmi addressed them.

Umar Lahmi: As decided yesterday, the Divinity of Christ and Atonement will be discussed today. Since it will be difficult to deal with both these subjects simultaneously it will be better to take them up one by one.

Peter: Both the problems are in fact one and interconnected, so you may take any one of them you like.

Umar Lahmi recited some verses of Surah Furqan. This changed the colour of the face of Isabella; she was so affected that she fell down in a swoon and her companions helped to raise her up. Peter and Michael asked the reason of her upset but she did not reply and warm drops of tears began to trickle down her face. She was revived with great difficulty and said on enquiry that she was having such fits for the last month which they should not mind but carry on the discussion. Some of the priests suspected that she was affected by Islam, but her assumed reply removed the suspicion and the proceedings of the meeting were resumed. After this interval Umar Lahmi got up again and spoke.

Umar Lahmi: Gentlemen, we have been told that the basic principles of Christianity are Divinity of Christ and Atonement, so I want to put just one question which will also solve the problem of the Divinity of Christ. What was the need of the sacrifice of the "Son of God" as an atonement ? For this purpose any pious man could have been selected who would have given his life as atonement for all sinners. Why in particular was the "Son of God" crucified?

To answer this question holy Peter was again selected, but he was in such a plight that he got up falteringly and spoke with a wavering tongue.

Peter: For atonement the "Son of God" was necessary, for all men, whether prophets or apostles are sinful and a sinner cannot atone for other sinners. Since Lord Jesus Christ was the only "Son of God" and free from sins, so he was sacrificed for the sake of all the sinners.

Umar Lahmi: Right, but just say what was crucified, whether it was divinity or the humanity in Christ. If the divinity of Christ was crucified, then it means that God as one and without any partner bore all the tortures of crucifixion and that death came on the personality of God, that is, "God" died. But if the humanity in Christ was crucified, then your answer loses all its force, as in that case crucifixion of a human being and not of God could have suited, for in both cases it was humanity in Christ that was sacrificed and not his divinity.

Peter: Surely, Lord Jesus was perfect divinity and perfect humanity, that both these were fully represented in him. But his humanity, like his divinity, was free from sins and so his sacrifice was necessary. As other human beings are all sinful, therefore, they could not suit for atonement.

Umar Lahmi: That is, because there was no human being in the world free from sin, "God" Himself had to come down, and His divinity was not crucified but His humanity. Suppose a person free from sins was needed for atonement, why did not God create a sinless man to die on the cross for atonement?

Peter: God alone knows His secrets. We cannot say why He did not do it and came Himself to the world for the purpose. But this much we know that God's coming to the earth for atonement indicates His great love and affection. That is, God loved His creatures to such an extent that He sent here His only "Son" to give his life as a recompense for others. This purpose could never have been accomplished by sending merely a man.

Umar Lahmi: If God had such a great love for His creatures, why did He not send this Son in the very beginning to be crucified? Was there no humanity before Christ for God's concern? Why did He manifest His love after thousands of years?

Peter: We do not know about this mystery. God's mysteries are known to God only.

Umar Lahmi: My question still stands. Reference to mystery again and again does not serve the purpose. Now if you say it was humanity which was crucified, then God's coming down was purposeless. Some other person could have been sacrificed.

Peter: I have given my reply. Man being sinful could not serve for atonement. Christ's humanity served for atonement and it was an embodiment of innocence and sinlessness.

Umar Lahmi: Since Christ's humanity was innocent and sinless, it became necessary to put on it the burden of the sins of all humanity. Holy priest, even you cannot understand your logic. How can I? What harm would have been done if this "Son of God," instead of taking on him the burden of others' sins, had done some such good which would have dominated the sins of all? In this case neither the burden of sins of all should have been put on sinless Christ, nor had he been crucified, nor even would it have given rise to the controversy of divinity and humanity. The remedy of sin is doing good. Christ on coming to the world should have done such a good as to atone for all the sins, not to commit suicide for atonement.

Peter: We cannot advise God. He did as He liked. It is your impudence to teach God.

Umar Lahmi: You know that Christ was born from the womb of Virgin Mary. Now say whether this birth related to man or God, that is, whether it was "God" who was born, or was it man?

Peter: God is immune from birth. It was the humanity in Christ which was born.

Umar Lahmi: And who died on the cross, God or man ?

Peter: God is also immune from death. It was man who died on the cross that is humanity in Christ.

Umar Lahmi: So the birth and death relate to Christ's humanity and not to his divinity.

Peter: Certainly, certainly.

Umar Lahmi (holding the Bible in his hand): Just see, it is written in the Book of Job (Ayyub) (15:14) that "he which is born of a woman" is sinful and since the birth was not of divinity but of humanity, therefore, according to the judgment of Job, even the humanity of Christ was sinful. And see it is written in Romans 6:23 that "the wages of sin is death," that is, death is the proof that the dead is sinful, therefore, the question comes again : why did not God crucify some other sinful man so that His divinity was saved ? Further, according to you, a sinner cannot atone for the sins of others. So Christ did not serve for atonement.

Peter (perturbed and perspiring): I have also said that all these are Divine mysteries. God did as He liked. How can you or I criticise Him?

Umar Lahmi: If your religion is based just on Divine mysteries, then why did you call us here and thus wasted your time and ours for two weeks?

Since Isabella was keenly interested in theological questions, she listened to all this talk most attentively and felt in her heart that when these priests cannot answer a question, they take the cover of Divine mystery. Just then priest Michael rose.

Michael: Brethren, today is a confrontation between Christian religion and Mohammedan religion. But do you know what is Mohammedan religion ? This religion allows for four marriages. It has ordered indiscriminate killing of non-Muslims and its Apostle married eleven women and. . . .

Umar Lahmi: If you are unable to answer my questions, say so clearly, and then whatever criticism you have against Islam you may put forth and I am ready to answer all. But is this your morality to call us at your place and then indulge in abusive talk instead of answering our questions. (Pointing to Isabella :) Now say if this attitude of your priests is proper.

On this Isabella at once got up and spoke in broken words.

Isabella: I have heard this talk from beginning to end. I am sorry that neither holy Peter nor Michael answered the questions put to them. Umar Lahmi's demand is quite justified that either his questions should be answered or defeat admitted. But I think you will do

neither. So it is better to conclude the discussion now so that Christian religion is not ridiculed and whatever your learning it is not exposed. It is quite strange that. . . .

Peter: Isabella! are you mad that you have come down to such nonsense talk ?

(Addressing the audience:) Surely this girl is possessed by the devil and she has deviated far from Christ, and no wonder if she has lost her senses.

Isabella : Instead of venting your anger on my poor self you should either answer the question of Muslims or end the discussion. I do not want to answer here the allegations made against me, but if this is the reward of my frankness I do not mind if you take me to be demented.

Michael: Will you not keep quiet? Talking, talking and talking. We have answered all questions of Muslims. If you have the courage, come forward and answer.

A priest: It seems that this girl has secretly become an unbeliever. How could she answer the questions of Muslims? Her respected father should be informed about her impudence and she should be duly punished.

Catherine (a companion of Isabella): It is unfortunate that you have not done justice and all of you fall upon poor Isabella. Some call her mad, others threaten her, but no one puts his mind to the real matter. Isabella is quite right to say that you people have not been able to answer the questions of Umar Lahmi, but it does not mean that Christian religion is not just. You people are worthless and are trying to give bad name to Christianity on account of your worthlessness.

Peter : Turn out these girls from here. Who allowed these wretched girls to interfere in our talk?

Umar Lahmi: If you allow me to speak I will explain what Isabella meant.

Michael: Do not interfere in our talk. It is a matter of our own.

Another priest: What if Isabella and Catherine have both become apostates!

Michael: We cannot say this just now. These girls are foolish and want to expedite the result of this discussion, although these matters take months and even years to settle.

These were adverse comments on these poor girls and charges framed and attributed. Seeing this tumult Umar Lahmi in his sonorous voice recited some verses of Surah Maryam, on which the whole assembly was struck dumb. Eminent priests closed their ears with fingers lest the words of the Qur'an should affect their hearts. Since there was praise of Prophet Jesus and his holy mother and the charges leveled against them by the Jews were refuted, Christians were favourably affected and Isabella's face in particular brightened. But this time she exercised patience and firmly set. After the recitation Isabella spoke.

Isabella: Gentlemen, I call upon you to bear witness that I am a strict Christian and so I do not want that Christians should be humiliated. I do not mean that we have no answer to their questions, only our priests do not put their mind to them, as they think that the help of the Holy Ghost is needed to understand the creed of Christianity. Muslims attribute this to our weakness. I hope that after this there will be no misunderstanding about me. Now I request that the discussion be resumed.

One priest: We do not at all need any talk with these "unbelievers". Already the talk has shaken our faith. What I mean is that these "unbelievers" should be at once turned out from the church.

Another priest: Do not talk in excitement. The matter should be decided after careful consideration. I also think that the discussion should end, as it is of no use.

Umar Lahmi: Gentlemen, you were very proud of the teaching of your Master that if anyone slaps you on one cheek you should present to him the other cheek also. But what is this that we see here? Have we entered here by force? Did you not call us here? Even now if you frankly say that you do not want to talk we will immediately leave. But I may tell you that we have delivered our message and Allah will not let our efforts go waste. Now, tell me if we should go or you want to talk.

Peter: Respected monitor, the thing is that you cannot understand the realities of Christian faith, nor have you come here for this purpose. But if you want to continue the talk you shall have to answer my questions.

Umar Lahmi; Very well. I give you full freedom to put any question and we shall calmly answer.

Peter: Has the Qur'an praised the Bible? Do you believe in the Bible?

Umar Lahmi; Certainly the Qur'an has praised the Bible and we all Muslims believe in the Bible, Taurat (the Psalms) and all the books revealed to Prophets.

Peter: Then why do you not believe in our Bible ?

Umar Lahmi: Because it is not the Bible. If anyone composes a fiction and names it Bible we are not bound to believe in it. You may put before us the Bible which the Qur'an has praised.

Peter: Is the Bible of the Qur'an different from our Bible ? Its proof?

Umar Lahmi: Because the Qur'an, while praising the original Bible, has falsified this Bible and pointed out its wrong statements.

Peter: What are the wrong statements of our Bible ?

Umar Lahmi: For instance, the Gospel of St. Matthew in 12 : 46-50 has called Mary an unbeliever, while the Qur'an has called her Siddiqah (the truthful), which means that she was not an unbeliever but a believer and pious. Similarly, in the Bible (Matthew, 12:46-50) it is said about Prophet Jesus that he was very arrogant and used to be disrespectful to his mother, although the Taurat strictly enjoins respect and veneration to mothers. But the Qur'an refutes it and says that Jesus had said that he was obedient to his mother and has been enjoined to do good to her. Or just as the Bible says that Jesus was accursed and because of his being accursed he was crucified [\*On Christ being accursed, see Galatians, 3 : 13. t iii, 45.]. But the Qur'an calls him the "Spirit of God" and the "Word of God" and that he was venerable both in this world and the next (wajihan fid-dunya wal-akhirah).

A voice: You are wrong. In the Bible he is said to be God.

Umar Lahmi: Yes, it is more surprising that according to you God can also be accursed. That you have cursed Christ while acknowledging him as God and do not mind at all how God Who is the Fountainhead of all good and perfections can deserve curse. It is the devil who deserves curse and not God. Islam does not deify Christ but calls him human and at the same time makes him innocent and free from sins. Now, you can judge whether an accursed "God" is better or a pure and sinless man.

Peter: The point is why you do not believe in the Bible. You have thrown into it the question of curse. If you have any original Bible which the Qur'an has confirmed, then bring that to us.

Umar Lahmi: You have no right to demand this from us. If you first agree that your Bible is made up and forged, then you can call for the real Bible. I have proved that the Qur'an does not affirm the validity of the current Bible but proves it false and has openly recounted its mistakes. Just fancy, can this Bible in which Christ has been deified and then killed on the cross be the Bible of the Qur'an which says that Christ says : "Inni 'Abd Allah" [I am a servant of God) and that "Ma qataluhu wa ma salabuho" [he was neither killed nor crucified].\* Has the Qur'an affirmed your Bible or proved it false ?

Peter: Has not the Qur'an called Jesus the "Spirit of God" and the "Word of God" ? Is it not a proof that he was above humanity.

Umar Lahmi: Surely the Qur'an has called Christ "the Word of God," but the Qur'an also says that words of God are innumerable and that if all oceans become ink and all trees pens they will not be able to recount all words of God as they are beyond count. So Christ also is one of these words of God. As to Christ being "the spirit of God," this also does not make him above humanity for the same word is used for Adam in the Qur'an which says: "fa iza sav-vaituhu wa nafakhfu fihi min ruhi" [when I completed the form of Adam I breathed My Spirit into him]\* so in that respect Christ is also like Adam. If Christ is "God," then Adam and all his progeny are "God".

Peter: If the Qur'an has called Adam the "spirit of God," it is a mistake as there is no other "spirit of God" except Christ.



Umar Lahmi: You think the entire Qur'an is wrong, but it was you who wanted that the divinity of Christ be proved from the Qur'an and so I proved from the Qur'an that he was not divine. If he can be "God" just by being the "spirit of God," then Adam was also "God". If you think the Qur'an is wrong in this respect, then why did you bring in the Qur'an ? Isabella; But you believe in the divinity of Prophet Muhammad, although he initiated bloodshed in the world and ordered killing of non-believers.

Umar Lahmi: Allah forbid ! I seek protection of Allah from this perverse belief! We regard our Holy Prophet just a man, only Chief of all Apostles and Crown of all Goodness. The essence of our belief is "La ilaha ill Allah Muhammad Rasul Allah" [There is no one worthy of worship except Allah and Muhammad is His apostle]. Anyone who regards the Holy Prophet as a God 's a non-believer and against Islam. As to the Prophet's initiating bloodshed in the world, this is utterly wrong. He surely waged war against nonbelievers as they wanted to annihilate the Prophet and the religion which he brought, but he did not touch those who were not so. The Qur'an enjoins fighting against those who fight with you.

. Christian priests have since long spread calumnies against Islam and attributed various ills to it. It is these priests who used to defame Islam by alleging that Muslims regarded the Prophet as God. The question of Isabella is the result of this propaganda.

Michael: You say it again and again that our Bible is not real, although it has been compiled by Disciples with the aid of the Holy Ghost, whom even the Qur'an praises and regards them as believers. Further, the Christians of the world have affirmed them.

Umar Lahmi: This is just the question, whether this Bible has actually been compiled by the Disciples to whom it is attributed or some non-believers wrote their books giving Disciples' names as authors. Even Christians do not agree that the Disciples have composed them. The Qur'an does not believe in the compiled Bible. It praises only that Bible which was revealed to Christ direct from Allah, as the Qur'an says : " Wa atainanal, Injila" [We gave the Book to Christ] and Christ himself says : "Atain al-Kitaba" [God has given me the Book],

On the other hand, you yourself admit that the books of the Bible were compiled by the Disciples when the Qur'an affirms revelation of the Bible to Christ.

Just then Isabella's father (the head priest) came and took the priests to task.

Head Priest: What is this wrestling ground you have put up here ? You are talking to "unbelievers" in the holy church and disrupting the faith of Christians. Christians come to me daily and complain of your inability. Many Christians have wavered in their faith and say that even my daughter Isabella has become unrestrained. (To Isabella :) You girl, who asked you to come here and what have you got to do with these discussions? You study the Quran secretly. I know all that you are doing. (Turning to the priests:) Yet she is a

foolish girl, but what has happened to all of you that you are bandying words with these unbelievers and displeasing Lord Jesus. If you do any such thing in future I will dismiss all of you.

With this snub of the head priest all the priests were perturbed and Isabella's face turned pale. No one could venture to give an explanation to the head priest. But one of the priests took courage and addressed the head priest.

The priest: Our holy father, what you say is quite true. Surely there is nothing but loss in talking with these "unbelievers". But, O holy father! do you want us to be humiliated throughout Spain? Do you want Christianity to die out in Spain? By our Lord Jesus, if we do not suppress them we will not be able to show face in this country. I may also mention that none of us could answer the objections of Muslims. If you are kind enough to attend to our humble request I will say that the questions put forth by Muslims cannot be solved without your honour's help. In the whole of Spain there is no better savant of Christianity than your honour, who can discharge this duty, and silence the "unbelievers" by terse answers. If your honour does not come forward to save Christianity at this time, then, our revered father, the consequences for us and for Christianity will be most serious and our preachers will be humiliated and defamed. May I hope that your honour will be ready to solve the problems raised by Muslims? Head Priest: You have yourself given importance to this matter by calling over Muslims here. It is unfortunate that you have not been able to answer foolish questions of Muslims, even after studying the problems of theology. Will these Muslims be rightly guided on getting a satisfactory answer ?

Michael: Yes, it is their promise that on being satisfied they will give up Islam and embrace Christianity. They have also given to us a written undertaking to this effect.

Head Priest (to Umar Lahmi): Say, what are your questions?

Umar Lahmi: It is only if you listen calmly to what I say that I will put my questions. The way you have treated us and demonstrated the Christian ethics demand that I should refuse to talk to you. But since I am a seeker of truth, I want to seek the light of guidance through you. Head Priest: Gentleman, you should not take offence at my harsh words and if our talk has injured your feelings I seek your pardon on behalf of all. Surely you seem to be a lover of truth and surely our Lord Christ will help and guide you. So you may come to my house sometime tomorrow when your doubts and misunderstandings will be dispassionately set at naught. (To priests:) You, gentlemen, may also come so that you may know answers to the questions of Muslims and in future you may yourselves deal with them.

### **The Third Round**

Let us see what Isabella had been doing in connection with these discussions and what were her activities in the meantime. In fact, all this time her mind was filled with the subject-matter of these discussions and all other engagements and social entanglements were relegated to the background. After "the discussion between the priests and Umar Lahmi she had come to the conclusion that the priests had no answer to the objections of Muslims and her belief in Christianity had been shaken and no argument could keep her firm on it. During this time she had often secretly met Umar Lahmi and sought information about the Muslim creed. The talk between Umar Lahmi and her father (the head priest) had also concluded at her house and more than a month had passed on it. Nevertheless she continued her enquiry. She had also met several times Ziad b. Umar, the Qazi of Islam in Cordova, through Umar Lahmi and got consolation from him. Ziad b. Umar, besides being a profound scholar of Islam, was a God-fearing man of piety. Muslims of Spain revered him as a Wali Allah (Friend of Allah). Isabella's mind was greatly affected by several visits to him and she became attached to Islam and fully realised that Islam is the true religion while Christianity is a mixture of misguidance and disruptions.

The head priest had asked Umar Lahmi in the cathedral to come to his house next day and had also invited all the priests. So early next morning Umar Lahmi with some of his associates and divines reached the house of the head priest and was treated with respect and given refreshments in a separate room. Then more than forty Christian divines also arrived and the head priest then addressed Umar Lahmi.

Head Priest: I know the questions which you will ask, but I do not want to go into details and prolong the talk. I will say just a word or two which may lead to the result in minutes instead of hours. What I mean is that Islam and Christianity may be tested by their basic teachings and whichever teaching is best the religion which taught it will be true. Is it not so ?

Umar Lahmi: I have no objection to anything and I am prepared to discuss on any lines that you choose. Surely it is by the teachings of Christianity and Islam that truth and falsehood can be known.

Head Priest: Bravo, bravo ! Surely the help of the Holy Ghost is on your side and you will soon come from the wrong path to right guidance. Now that you have agreed to the lines suggested by me, let me proceed. In every religion there are basic principles and matters of detail. I want to put before you the essence of Christianity in just one word and desire that you will also give the essence of your religion in one word. Do you agree?

Umar Lahmi: Yes, you may proceed. I agree to whatever you say.

Head Priest (to the priests) : See, this is the way to talk! Just one word decides the issue. (To Umar Lahmi:) Now listen. The essence of Christianity is "Love". Christianity has

been condensed in a single word. Now, you have also to give the essence of Islam in one word.

Umar Lahmi: I am proud to say that Islam has also condensed the essence of its teachings in a single word which covers all basic principles and details. The root of Islamic principles and teachings is Tauhid (unity).

Head Priest: If the essence of Islam is Tauhid (unity), then love has been excluded from it. Besides, we also say "unity" to be the essence of our religion.

Umar Lahmi: If Tauhid were the essence of your religion, you should have said so. Why did you say that love is the essence of your religion? Now, it is quite wrong to say that by accepting "unity" as the essence of religion, "love" is excluded from it. On the other hand, the fact is that "love" comes from "unity". If "unity" is not taken with all its requisites, love will be a meaningless word. To accept "love" as the essence of religion means total denial of "unity," or not to take it as the essence of religion.

Head Priest: The thing is that "unity" comes from "love" and not "love" from "unity".

Umar Lahmi: This is an example of perverted logic. If unity comes from love, then love is quite a meaningless word. Because without unity, that is, want of knowledge of Allah, love of Allah will be excluded from it as love of Allah depends on the knowledge of the divine, and unity is but the true recognition of the divine. Mere love does not prove love of Allah.

Head Priest: You have started a long discussion. What I mean is that love has no place in Islam.

Umar Lahmi: If love has no place in Islam, then love does not exist at all in the world. It can, on the other hand, be said that there is not the least trace of love in Christianity. Where love is merely a verbal claim, it has neither any standard nor proof.

Head Priest: Look here. It is a well-known slogan of our Scriptures that God is love. Is it not the proof of love ?

Umar Lahmi: It is nothing but merely a verbal claim. Unless there is a standard of love, the prescribed theory of love will not be acceptable.

Head Priest: Now, you define the standard of love. Have not our Scriptures called God father? Does not father love his children?

Umar Lahmi: Mere repetition of the word love leads us nowhere unless all its conditions are fulfilled. If anyone loves another, he should prove it by the sacrifice of his life and possessions and then only can he be said to have loved truly. Therefore Islam has prescribed obedience and service as the criterion of love which is another name of sacrifice of life and possessions. The Quran says to the Prophet: "Qul in kuntum tuhibbun

Allah fat-tabi'unl yuhbibkum Allah" [Say: If you love Allah, follow me: Allah will love you].\* Thus this verse has prescribed a standard of love which has discriminated between true and false love. But in your religion there is no criterion of love. Any pretender can stand up and say that he loves Allah.

Head Priest: You have again started a long discussion. I want that everything should be comprehensive so that the decision may be arrived at quickly. However, if your Qur'an has also called God father, which is the highest position of love ?

Umar Lahmi: If the Qur'an had used the word father for God, it would have been the greatest proof of its deficiency. Islam never used this misleading word for God but, on the other hand, has used such words as have the most sublime significance as compared to the term father.

Head Priest: You are very impudent, calling the word "father" misleading. Now, tell me quickly what better word Islam has used instead of father. (The head priest's neck at this time became stiff and foam came from his mouth in great anger.)

Umar Lahmi: There is no reason for the loss of temper. I have called the word "father" misleading because it has become the basis of assigning partners to Allah, and people invented a son to Allah. Christians also believe in the divinity of Christ. As to the better word in place of father used by Islam, that word is Rabb (fosterer), which implies a Being who fosters from beginning to end and his fostering care never ends. So by using the word "fosterer" Islam has taught that Allah's fostering love is never withdrawn. But the concept of father implies that father will care for his child up to a certain time and will then become indifferent. Besides, a father can care for his child only in optional matters but not in matters beyond his control. If the child falls ill, father cannot cure his illness while the fostering of Allah is. not so; He has power over everything and in nothing is He helpless and His fostering care is everlasting. This proves that, instead of father, fosterer is more suited to the Dignity of Allah and, besides, fosterer is indicative of "Unity of Allah," while father is the source of assigning partner to Allah in the world.

Head Priest: The effects of the fosterer as indicated by you find no proof in the world while you cannot shut your eyes to father's love. So how can one accept a word without meaning which has no proof in the world, while you cannot ignore the effects of father's love.

Umar Lahmi: Unfortunately, the creed of Atonement has clouded your vision, otherwise you could not have said so. We see every day that a child is fostered in its mother's womb and in childhood and youth and old "age the fostering care continues. That is, his fostering continues from beginning to end. Is it not the work of the Rabb (fosterer) which we see every day ?

Head Priest: The Holy Bible says that God has such a love with the people of the world that He sacrificed His only child for the sake of men. What better proof can be of love that father sacrifices his dearest thing for love.

Umar Lahmi: This very statement of the Bible refutes your claim. You mean that the father is one who sacrifices his pure and innocent son for the sake of impure and sinful men. That is, father's love was manifested thus that he killed his innocent son. But the fosterer is one who is not unjust to anyone. On the other hand, He punishes the unjust. The Quran says: "Wa la tuziru waziratun wizra ukhra" [And no burdened soul can bear another's burden].\* But your father killed his own child. If to crucify and kill one's innocent and sinless child is love we cannot touch such love with a pair of tongs.

Head Priest (to other priests) : I had- thought that this man was inclined to Jesus Christ, but he is a stiff "unbeliever". Everything that I have said is of high order but how can these people understand them ? (To Umar Lahmi:) Your heart has turned black. Christ does not want to accept you. Now, you go away from here. I have nothing to do with you. You just came to annoy me. (To the priests:) You should also have no concern with these people. You have seen that they are so hot-headed, they would not agree to anything.

Umar Lahmi But, sir....

Head Priest: Shut up, now. I have seen for what purpose you came here and with what object you talk to us.

So saying the Head Priest, exhibiting his Christian manners, left for his room on the upper storey. Umar Lahmi and other Muslim divines came out raising the cry of "Nasrun min Allah wa fathun qarib" [Help from Allah and victory is at hand].

Voicing the slogan of victory, Umar Lahmi and other Muslim divines repaired to their respective homes. Isabella had attentively listened to the talk of both sides. With her were her friends and other respectable Christian ladies. In the evening when Isabella's friends gathered again comments started on the morning talk. Whatever little faith Isabella had in Christianity was shattered and she fully realised that the Christian creed was just a sham which had neither any basis nor any principle. Earlier meetings had left her with the impression that Michael, Peter and others were not well informed, but her father, the head priest, had profound knowledge of the reality of Christianity and, therefore, if these people were unable to meet the questions of Muslims, she had thought, her father would be able to silence them. But after listening this last talk she was thoroughly disappointed and had left no alternative but to conclude that the basis of Christianity was no better than the spider's web.

A month had passed and a great revolution had come in the mind of Isabella. She had secretly been meeting Umar Lahmi and, through him, other divines like Ziad b. Umar in Cordova. She was now more devoted to the study of the Holy Quran and the truth of Islam was taking deep root in her mind. She made a comparative study of the Quran and the Bible to find out which of the two had greater truth and which was just a mixture of superstitions. She had given thought according to her lights to the problems of Unity of

Allah, Prophethood, the Quran, salutation, atonement, intercession, meaning of sin and human acts and their consequences.

She was no longer a devotee of Christianity, but had bowed her head to Islam. But often she was perturbed with the idea of giving up a religion she had followed from her birth. What trials and tribulations she might have to face on going over to Islam. She will have to forsake her father, mother, sisters and relatives. How shall be her future life. But immediately it struck her that trials and troubles have to be encountered in the path of truth and if, after recognising the truth, she did not openly declare it she will be guilty in the sight of Allah.

When Umar Lahmi learnt of her perturbation he secretly sent word to her to recite ten times each morning and evening the verse of the Holy Quran: "Rabbi adkhilni mudkhala sidqin wa akhrijni mukhreja sidqin waj'al-li min-ladunka sultaman nasira" [My Lord! make me enter a truthful entering, and make me go forth a truthful going forth, and grant me from Thy presence an authority to help (me)].\* Allah willing, her anxiety will be relieved.

So Isabella followed this advice. By reciting this verse morning and evening she felt as if some mysterious power was giving strength to her heart and removing her fears. This prompt effect of the verse further strengthened her faith in Islam and she became more devoted to the Quran and Islam.

## **Meeting of the Men of Allah**

This was the time when Muslims had started building mosques and schools all over Spain and eminent divines and jurists of Islam had come over to this country. In the capital Cordova the Islamic system of teaching and training had been introduced. Ziad b. Umar was a highly learned traditionist, philosopher and interpreter of the Quran. At the same time he had no equal in offering prayers and, due to his integrity, purity, and unostentatious prayerfulness, he was held in great affection throughout Spain. He would spend his days in teaching and at nights he would attend gatherings of divines and officials of the government. His house was adjacent to the University of Cordova and so after isha prayer those interested in learning gathered at his house.

One day while this meeting was in progress and eminent divines and men of letters were present, Ziad b. Umar came. All stood up in his respect. After they were seated Ziad enquired after everyone's health and then addressed Umar Lahmi.

Ziad b. Umar: May Allah fructify your efforts! You have conveyed the message of truth in the very home of unbelief and humbled unbelievers. Umar Lahmi: I am just an ordinary weak Muslim and this has been possible because of your prayers. Isabella has accepted Islam in her heart. She was desirous of meeting you, so she has come here for an audience.

Ziad b. Umar : Oh! Is Isabella present here? Umar Lahmi: Yes, she has been put up in the adjoining house and if you permit she may be brought to your presence.

Ziad: Yes, certainly. If she has come to meet me, let her come.

Asad (one of those present): By Allah, sir, this is very great. There is a great commotion among the Christians of Cordova. But is it Isabella alone who has been attracted to Islam or are there others also with her?

Umar Lahmi: About this you will hear from Isabella herself.

Another of the audience: I have heard that Christians intend to kill Isabella.

Umar Lahmi: So far Isabella has taken great care to keep it secret. No one has found out that she has embraced Islam or intends to do. So the rumour of the intention to kill her is premature.

Ziad: Now call Isabella here. We shall hear the interesting details from her own lips.

Shortly after Isabella enters and, seeing Ziad b. Umar sitting at a prominent place, raises her hand to salute him and sits in a corner, while all those present congratulate her on her great courage and firmness.



Ziad: Daughter Isabella, I congratulate you on your love of truth Allah has taken you out of the darkness of unbelief and granted you the boon of Islam, relieved you from the labyrinth of Trinity and put you on to the Straight Path beset with dangers. To remain firm on it is the task of a very brave person. But those in whose hearts Islam has firmly established itself would not mind the greatest trouble of the earth. Allah guides them.

Isabella: Revered father. . . .

Ziad: Daughter, you have to give up such words too. There is no papacy in Islam. Islam has not given its divines the position which Christians have given to their priests. There is perfect equality in Islam. The only duty of the divines is to guide Muslims in the light of the Holy Quran and sacred Traditions of the Prophet. It is the duty of Muslims to act on that guidance and not to "deify them or make them masters of all their affairs.

Isabella (ashamed): Now you will yourself teach me how I should address you and other leaders of Islam.

Ziad: Address me and other Muslims just as brothers, but if you desire to add anything, just say "Sir".

Isabella : Very well, sir, I will obey all your orders in future. Oh sir, it is a great benevolence and grace of God that He showed this humble servant the path of truth and justice and took me out of the course of Trinity and worship of the Cross. The means of my guidance is my spiritual preceptor and benefactor Umar Lah-mi, who preached to all the priests of Cordova in their own homes and, through him, the call of truth reached my ears. I wholeheartedly pray that God grant him all the boons of this world and the next and by your prayer my life and death be on Islam.

All those present cried: Amin.

Ziad: Daughter, Allah wants to take from you great service and surely Muslims will be greatly benefited through you. But say if you have converted any one of the other ladies.

Isabela: Yes, sir, I have four other friends of mine who have lost their faith in Christianity and are inclined to Islam. God willing, I will bring them with me tomorrow or the day after, that they may have grace from you and any doubts that may still lurk in them are removed.

Umar Lahmi: Sister, who are these friends of yours? By Allah, we have no knowledge of them and you never mentioned them to me.

Isabela: One of them is the daughter of Michael, my teacher in theology, and there are other three. All these have been listening to all the discussions.

Umar Lahmi: Have they really become Muslimss and seen through the weaknesses of Christianity ?

Isabella: The weaknesses of Christianity have become manifest to all of them, and they have recognised the truth of Islam, but they have not yet mustered enough courage to give up their ancestral religion and declare their adherence to Islam.

Ziad: Well, Allah will give them the necessary courage. We shall also pray for them.

Umar Lahmi: Bring Michael's daughter also some day so that her doubts may also be removed.

Isabella: Tomorrow or day after I will surely bring her with me and if all the four girls do not come, I will bring at least this one (Michael's daughter) with me.

Ziad: I tell you, daughter, again that you should accept Islam after clearing all your doubts and never, by any greed or deception, for Allah wants sincerity and the Quran says that a Muslim's life and death, prayer and devotion, sitting and standing, sleep and walking everything should be for Allah and the pleasure of Allah should be the aim of our life. Isabella: Oh sir, I say it and bring God to witness that no lust or greed has brought me to the threshold of Islam, nor the acquisition of wealth and power is my aim. You yourself know the honour my father enjoys in Cordova and throughout Spain.

Ziad: May Allah reward you, give you firmness and shower His bounties on you.

Umar Lahmi: Islam is the only religion by accepting which Allah's bounties are showered on man and all his sins are forgiven.

Isabella (smiling): All my sins are forgiven every week by the priest of Cordova, who is in charge of the department of inquisition and (bowing her head) I am already sinless and innocent.

Ziad: What is this department of inquisition and what is the meaning of the priest forgiving sins ? Can any man also forgive sins ?

Isabella (with a sham humility): Oh sir, this story is most interesting and probably quite novel to you, as you are not aware of the inner working of Christianity.

Ziad: Will you inform us of these matters? Such interesting facts should certainly be worth knowing and no one can relate them better than you.

Isabella: Oh sir! Christians go before the altar of the Christ in the presence of the head priest every week and confess their sins which the head priest forgives as, according to Christian creed, the head priest has power to do that as he is considered to be the representative of Saint Peter.

Ziad: La hawla wala quwwata ilia billah [Allah forgive us! There is no power or authority except with Allah]. Can any man forgive sins except Allah ? This is why the Quran has

accused Christians that they have made their priests and elders their Rabb (fosterer) besides Allah. (In surprise) Have the priests the authority to forgive all sins?

Isabella: Yes, provided the sinner confesses all his open and secret sins before the priest. If he has concealed anything it will not be forgiven.

## **Behind the Curtain**

In the course of this talk Umar Lahmi addressed Isabella.

Umar Lahmi: So for securing forgiveness of sins all kinds of dirty acts have to be narrated? But how did you use to seek forgiveness?

Isabella (lowering her eyes with modesty): On a given date everyone has to go to the great church, the same where you had discussion with Michael and Peter and then. . .

Umar Lahmi: Are girls also bound to appear?

Isabella: Yes, every adult girl and boy is present there and the priest enquires from everyone what sins he had committed the previous week. After stating the sins and making confession, the priest, passing his hand on the head of the sinner, says: Now go. By the blessing of Jesus Christ all your sins are forgiven.

Umar Lahmi: Are questions put to everyone in seclusion or in the presence of all?

Isabella: It would not have been so shameful if everyone were asked to confess in seclusion. But everyone is questioned in the presence of all before the certificate of pardon is granted.

Umar Lahmi: Allah forgive! Even in the presence of unmarried boys and girls?

Isabella: Yes, and in fact (bowing her head in shame again) unmarried boys and girls have to confess in public and in the hearing of all.

Umar Lahmi: Allah forgive us! In the confession of sins many shameful things may have to be stated. Supposing one has committed theft, he shall have to confess it before all.

Isabella: Not only theft, even the most heinous act has to be publicly confessed. If anyone does not confess and conceals something, then the pardon is not granted and the sinner is threatened of Hell.

Umar Lahmi: This might be having a very bad effect on the morals of unmarried boys and girls.

Isabella: Certainly. But among the Roman Catholics no importance is attached to sins securing pardon of sins being so easy. This has made people bold in committing sins.

One of the audience: Are sins of common people forgiven by the priest himself?

Ziad (smiling): Probably the priest may not be committing any sins.

At this stage Ziad b. Umar leaves the meeting and goes upstairs to devote himself in prayer and devotion.

Isabella (lowering eyes in shame and modesty) : You cannot conceive what our religious leaders do, particularly our monks, and how full of sins is their life.

Umar Lahmi: What! Are the lives of religious leaders even worse than common people? What are you talking? It does not mean that by becoming a Muslim you make false allegations against anyone. Punishment of false accusation is very severe according to the Holy Quran.

Isabella: You must think like that because you are not aware of the black record of the monks' lives and since you cannot even conceive of these shameful acts, you may not be wrong if you think me lying or disbelieve me.

Umar Lahmi: Is it a fact? If so, please let us know in detail.

All those present insisted that Isabella should throw some light on these matters so that they may have an idea of the great boons conferred by Islam.

Isabella: You know that abandoning the world and the life of a monk have been greatly stressed in Christianity and, therefore, most of our priests have adopted monkery and have forsaken the world. To gain salvation they take great pains and afflict their bodies. In the same way women also become nuns (that is follow in the footsteps of Virgin Mary and lead unmarried lives). But at the same time monks and nuns cannot maintain their chastity. Monks and religious leaders are also corrupt and nuns often completely lose their chastity. Because of confession and pardon monks often find a good opportunity to satisfy their lust. Nuns are mostly involved in this moral depravity while some monks do not spare even their mothers and sisters. ... [Laski, History of Civilization of Europe, Vol. II].

(At this stage Isabella is extremely ashamed and perspires.)

All present: Allah protect us ! Allah forgive us ! All power and authority is with Allah!

Umar Lahmi: These things happen because Christianity has dignified unmarried life and asceticism which is against Nature and Divine law. A strong argument of the falsity of Christianity is also that it enjoins on men such laws as are against Nature which men cannot follow. It is for this that the Apostle of Islam had declared that La Rahbaniyat fil-Islam. [There is no monkery or giving up the world in Islam.] He also said : An-nikah min sunnati fa-man raghaba an sunnati fa-laisa minni [Marriage is my system and whosoever turns away from my system is not of me]. The Quran says: "And (as for) monkery, they innovated it—We did not prescribe it to them, but they did not observe it with its due observance." And how can anyone observe a thing which is unnatural and against law?

Isabella: Has Islam prohibited monkery and abandoning the world?

Umar Lahmi: Certainly. You have just heard what the Holy Quran and the Prophet of Islam say.

Isabella was greatly moved on this and the dignity of Islam was further enhanced in her mind.

A person: So the monks do not discriminate between the permissible and the prohibited, between right and wrong ?

Isabella: There are many shameful things. When the honour of their mothers and sisters is not safe at their hands, what else they would not be doing !

Mr Laski in his book, European Morals, has very elaborately exposed the depravities of monks and priests in general and has written that there was no moral crime which they did not commit.

A person: Are the nuns also so corrupt?

Isabella: Allah may protect us. Their condition is worse than monks.

Even European historians have testified that when a tank in a school of nuns was cleaned out several thousand craniums of babies were found there which had been thrown in to conceal corruption of some of them.

Umar Lahmi: In fact the root of all this corruption is the creed, of Atonement which has given licence to Christians to commit sins.

Isabella: Surely, you have understood it well. In fact, the creed of Atonement has taken away the fear of sins and everyone is confident that by confessing before the priest all kinds of sins will be forgiven.

Umar Lahmi: Allah-o-Akbar (Allah is great!). The greatness and truth of Islam is also manifest from the fact (hat while rejecting the creed of Atonement, it has made good conduct the basis of salvation and felicity and at the same time it has propounded the principle that: "He who does an atom's weight of good will see it. And he who does an atom's weight of evil will see it."

A person (to Isabella): You know that the creed of Atonement has induced Christians to commit sins, but there is also another reason. Christians consider all Prophets to be sinners and think that they have been committing all kinds of sins in their life.

Isabella: This seems to be wrong. If the holy Prophets are also taken to be sinners, then who will be left to cause aversion from sins and what right shall they have to ask people to refrain from sins ?

Umar Lahmi: You are right, but what would you say to the Christians regarding holy Apostles (Allah forbid!) as idol-worshippers, adulterers and liars ?

Isabella: Oh brother! it is really the creed of Christians. They regard Apostles as idol-worshippers and also liars. If this is so, which of the Christian books say so ?

Umar Lahmi: My sister! you do not know yet the ideas of Christians and, in order to justify their own sins, what serious accusations they have made against Apostles. Since you have not yet carefully studied your sacred books you are surprised at my words. I assure you that if Islam had not come and the Champion of all Goodness, the Chief of Apostles, had not exposed the untruths of Christians and Jews, no one would have found any proof of the chastity of Apostles today.

Isabella : Are the Christians so shameless that they still believe in Prophets while considering them sinners. Probably you have misunderstood. I have not yet heard from anyone that Apostles worshipped idols and told untruths. Can you prove your allegations from the religious and revealed books of Christians ?

Umar Lahmi: Certainly from your revealed books. . . .

Isabella : My religious and revealed books! My religious and revealed book is the Holy Quran.

Umar Lahmi: I mean the books which you as a Christian regarded religious and revealed. They contain all these things.

Isabella : Very strange ! But kindly give some proof of it.

Umar Lahmi: I say it again that in the sacred Christian books Prophets (Allah forbid!) have been described as adulterers and idol-worshippers. It is said about Prophet Lut (Lot) (the Old Testament in his hand) had sexual intercourse with his daughters. See Genesis, Chapter 19, verses 32-38. About Prophet David it is said that he had. sexual intercourse with an alien woman. See Samuel 2, Chapter 11, verse 4. Then it is said about Prophet Samson (Shamshun) that he had intercourse with an alien woman and then had a love affair with another. See Judges, chapter 16, verse 1.

All present: Allah forbid ! Allah may curse the Jews and Christians! Allah forgive us! Allah forgive us!

Isabella is ashamed and perspires and could not speak.

Umar Lahmi : Now, listen further. In the Christian sacred books Prophets have also been said to have been liars. First the Prophet Samson (Shamshun) told a lie and taught a wrong thing to a woman thrice. See Judges, chapter 16. Next a Prophet (whose name is not mentioned in the Bible) told a lie. See 2 Kings, chapter 13. Another Prophet also told a lie. See 1 Kings, chapter 20. Christ told a lie. See 1 Kings, chapter 22, verse 15. Apostle

Jeremiah also spoke a lot of falsehood. See Jeremiah, chapter 38. (To Isabella :) You know Saint Paul very well. What do the Christians say of him ?

Isabella : Christians believe Saint Paul to be a prophet and all great priests are regarded as successors of Saint Paul and for this they are authorised to forgive sins.

Umar Lahmi: Quite right. But is it not said about him in all the four Bibles that when the enemies arrested Jesus Christ and wanted to arrest Saint Paul, he thrice cursed Jesus-Christ and told a lie that he did not know him (Christ)?

Isabella : Of course, it is so written. I used to take daily lessons of the Bible from my teacher, Michael.

Umar Lahmi: Now, take the proof of the third thing that, according to Christians, Prophets worshipped idols. It is written in the Book of Exodus (which is the fourth part of Taurat), chapter 32, verse 4, that Prophet Aaron asked his people to make idols and taught them to worship them. In chapter 11 of 1 Kings, it is said that Prophet Solomon at the insistence of his wife worshipped idols in his old age and thus assigned partners to Allah. Allah forbid!

Isabella : Allah protect us !

Umar Lahmi: Look, I have the Bible with me and I have marked relevant portions. You may see yourself that I am not telling a lie. (Isabella turns over the pages and reads all the references.) My object in referring to these is that Christians boldly and fearlessly commit all kinds of sins because, according to them, Prophets also committed them (Allah forbid !) and they think that when Prophets were not deprived of their prophethood in spite of their sins, why should common people be condemned on that very account.

Isabella: Does the Quran call all Prophets innocent ?

Umar Lahmi: It is the greatest merit of the Quran that it has strongly repudiated all the wrong ideas and allegations of the Jews and Christians and declares that Prophets did not even think of committing sins, to say the least of actually committing them. The Quran says that what the Prophets prohibited they had never even thought of doing it, and the Quran counts all Prophets among the virtuous.

Isabella : Is it not written in the Quran that Prophet Adam ate the fruit of the prohibited tree ? Is it not disobedience of God's orders a sin?

Umar Lahmi: The definition of sin is that it is an act which is committed deliberately. Anything done unintentionally is not a sin. For instance, a man is prohibited from eating or drinking while he is observing fast, but if anyone eats and drinks in forgetfulness the fast is not broken and there is no sin. Prophet Adam also ate the fruit of the prohibited tree in forgetfulness as the Quran says : "We had taken a pledge from Adam but he forgot it and We did not find deliberation in him."



Isabella: Glory to God! I know it today that Adam committed no sin, otherwise Christian priests used to allege that Adam is described as a sinner in the Quran. (Suddenly becoming conscious of the time) Oh! I am very much delayed and should go home at once. My father and mother will be anxiously waiting for me, and I have not yet taken my food.

Umar Lahmi: If you like food can be served to you here. The common food of my master (Ziad b. Umar) will be served to all of us, You may also participate. Will you accept this request of mine?

Isabella: Thank you very much, but I will prefer to take food at my house, for mother does not eat till I return after walk. She always takes food with me.

Umar Lahmi: How long will she have your company in taking food! At last one day the secret has to be out.

Isabella: Leave it to the time when it comes, but just now permit me to leave.

Umar Lahmi: When will you bring your friends with you?

Isabella: Tomorrow if possible, otherwise day after tomorrow certainly. And now you should pray that they should also be guided to the right path like me.

All present : Amin!

## **Inside the House**

Leaving the auspicious and glowing meeting at the house of Ziad b. Umar, Isabella took the road straight to her home which ran through the Palace of Martyrs to Suqul Asafir. Isabella's house was just a few paces away. The meeting had filled her with such joy that, unmindful of everything around, she walked quietly and soberly with downcast eyes. Half an hour later she reached home where her mother was waiting impatiently for her. On enquiry about the cause of her delay Isabella named a friend of her's, at whose house she was delayed. On her mother's order the dining table was set and she immediately sat down and began to eat. Soon her father (the head priest) also arrived and the night passed peacefully.

Early next morning the Muezzins called for the Fajr prayer from all mosques of Cordova. How pleasant is the sound and how, in the salubrious hour of morning, people were being roused for bowing and prostrating for the Fajr prayer with the name of Allah. How enchanting is the sound of Allah-o-Akbar, Allah-o-Akbar, (Allah is great, Allah is great). Now the gongs of churches also began to toll. How jarring and meaningless is the sound. Truly the condition of each community is known from its rites. From mosques devotees began to emerge. Labourers, traders and cultivators took their respective ways to places of work, markets and fields. The chirping of birds had somewhat sub-sided.

Hearing the call of prayer Isabella got out of her bed and went to the library room of her house and sitting at a table began to study a book. In the meantime Peter and Michael also came there and Isabella stood up and received them with respect. A little later Isabella's father also came and took his seat in the room and Isabella's mother was also called in. Isabella was frightened at this unexpected, uncalled and strange gathering and suspected that these people had assembled on her account and probably her association with Islam had come to their knowledge. Colour went out of her face and her heart began to throb quickly and so, taking the excuse of thirst, she went for water to another room.

The head priest, addressing Isabella's mother, Peter and Michael said: Do you know what is the state of Isabella and how is she trying to humiliate and degrade us? It is to think about this matter that I have given you the trouble to come over here.

Peter: Oh ! What is the matter!

Head Priest: It is all very serious. I have been hearing for some time that Isabella has given up Christian creed and has secretly embraced Islam.

Helena (Isabella's mother): Fie, fie ! What are you talking? Jesus Christ may never do it. What is the matter that you are so enraged today that, without any reason, you have made my daughter a Muslim ?

Head Priest: What I am saying is quite true. If not today, you will learn it a few days after. Peter: Holy father, you have said something strange. Isabella is a very good girl. She has studied theology. She is not ignorant as to accept the bloody religion of Islam.

Helena: Well, I am just calling the girl. I do not know what caused this suspicion in you.

So saying Helena went to the room where Isabella was sitting horrified in a corner. Helena at once caught the hand of Isabella and said to her: Listen, daughter, your father calls you. Isabella who had realised the situation rose up and followed her mother to the large room and presented herself to the head priest.

Isabella's father beckoned to Michael and asked him to talk to her.

Michael: Daughter, we have heard that you have revolted from Christianity. Is it true? If anyone has given wrong report about you, you may refute it.

Isabella heard this and kept quiet and, lowering her eyes, began to weep. Warm tears began to drop on her rosy cheeks.

Helena: Just see. Did not I tell you that someone has falsely accused my daughter. What refutation could she give! Her tears speak that the allegation of her revolt from Christianity is quite false.

Head Priest: You just keep quiet for a while and let Isabella herself reply. Yes, daughter, tell me what is this report about you?

Isabella continued to remain silent with bowed head. But on persistent questioning from Peter and Michael she was compelled to open her lips.

Isabella: I have not yet accepted Islam but continue to remain Christian.

Michael: If you have not yet accepted Islam, do you intend to accept it in future?

Isabella: Why do you ask me about future? I can put the same question to you.

Michael: Then tell me what is your opinion about Islam?

Isabella: I do not abuse Islam like others for in the Muslim sacred Books Christ is praised and Muslims speak well of him.

Michael: Then you love Islam and Muslims?

Isabella: You may call it love or anything else. Anyway I am not ungrateful. If Muslims respect our Christ, then I also must respect their Prophet and their Sacred Book.

Peter: So it is clear now that in your heart you have become a Muslim, otherwise you would not have so praised Islam and Muslims. But now tell me what do you think about the religion you have been believing, that is Christianity.

Isabella: I have faith in the Bible and all revealed books, but I do not accept the flaws which later Christians have introduced in religion.

Head Priest (addressing Michael, Peter and Isabella's mother) • Now you have known her ideas. There is no other remedy to it except the sword.

Peter: Please give me time. I will explain to her and she will surely be reformed. I will remove her misunderstandings. Anyway, she has studied books on theology.

Head Priest: Well, you may try and see, otherwise I will think of some other remedy for her.

After this talk the meeting dispersed and the head priest, taking Peter and Michael with him, left for the great church as there was a large crowd of Christians of Spain to see the relics (bones, etc.) of Prophets and the head priest. They had come from long distances to participate in the ceremony and the head priest had gone to bless thousands of Christians.

The priests having left, Isabella went to her room and silently thought about her future. She was now convinced that she was sure to be put to torture and she will have to face severe trials. Yet she found her mind at ease and heart strong and prepared to meet all troubles.

She took out a paper from her table and wrote a letter to her friend Mirano (daughter of Priest Michael) to the following effect:

"My dear sister!

"Last night at nine I attended the meeting of Muslim divines at which my spiritual father Umar Lahmi and other divines were present. How can I describe its atmosphere, my sister ! A wonderful spiritual assembly it was. My participation in it greatly fortified my heart. I wish you were also present there. I have made a promise with their spiritual leader Ziad b. Umar to take you with me tomorrow or day after to them. A strange thing happened today. It appears that I am going to be put to trial. Pray that God may keep me ever on the right path. It so happened that my father got some information about me that I have embraced Islam and so he called your father [Michael] and Peter to his house and many questions were asked from me. Now, just fancy with my father on one side and Michael and Peter on the other, in what difficult position I was placed. But I also gave them stunning replies. Now, Peter has given promise to my father that he will make me understand. If any such occasion comes you must also be present along with other three friends. Other details I will give you verbally.

"Your sister, Isabella."

After finishing the letter she called her maidservant and told her to go to Mirano and bring from her a book. She also gave her the letter which, she said, was lying with her for some time and asked her to deliver it to Mirano. The maid-servant did as she was ordered

and, going to Michael's house, gave the letter to Mirano, who immediately opened and read it and said to the maid-servant that she will herself bring the book in the evening.

Isabella and her other friends met together in the evening in the same garden in which Isabella had first heard the talk of Umar Lahmi. She informed her friends all that had happened and consulted them. It was also decided that next evening they should all go to attend the meeting of Ziad b. Umar and also inform him of everything. After enjoying the evening walk of the garden all the girls left for their respective homes.

## Inside Knowledge

Next morning a maid-servant brought a note from Michael to Isabella which said : Daughter Isabella ! I have to talk to you on something; you should come to me at once leaving all other work. I am waiting for you. Isabella realised that it was in continuation of the previous day's plan. Informing her mother she left for Michael's house, where Peter and another well-known monk, highly popular and famous throughout Spain for his ascetic life, were also present. Michael's daughter Mirano hurriedly dispatched a messenger to call her other friends and very soon all the friends collected there. Michael then addressed Isabella.

Michael: Yesterday, you put off the matter by giving ambiguous answers to our questions. Today I want to talk to you very frankly. Now say, will you answer my questions correctly ?

Isabella: In the first place, I am not so able as to respond to your questions and, secondly, there is no such matter as to need interrogation. But you may ask and I will try to answer according to my understanding.

Michael: Have you become a Muslim?

Isabella: I answered this question yesterday and do not want to say anything more.

Michael: Well, now say if you believe in the holy divinity and in Jesus Christ being "God" with his necessary existence.

Isabella: I do believe God as God, not any man as God.

Michael: So it is clear that you do not believe in the divinity of Lord Jesus Christ. Now what is left there in your being a confirmed Muslim?

Isabella: I mean that there is no proof anywhere in the Bible that Jesus was God.

Michael: For God's sake, do not calumniate the Holy Bible. Have you not read in the Bible that he was the "Son of God"?

Isabella: There have been other "sons" of God also and so they should also be called "God".

Michael: Never. Except Lord Jesus Christ, no other man was a true "son" of God.

Isabella (holding the Bible in her hand): Well, please explain to me the meaning of this passage : "The Jews again lifted stones to strike Christ who told them: I have shown you many good things from the father; on which of these you are stoning me? The Jews said: We are not stoning you on good acts but on your infidelity that being a man you call yourself God. Christ said: Does not your creed say that you are God ? When it calls those

God to whom divine revelations came, then the person whom God sent to the world after glorifying him, how can you say that he talks infidelity. This is why I said that I am son of God." [ Jonah, chapter 1, verses 31-36,]

Now the question is what previous Apostles have been called God? Christians believe that these predecessors were called God metaphorically and in love. I say the same. Jesus Christ is also called God in the metaphorical sense and in love, and not because he was really God as alleged.

Michael: Accursed girl! you have become very talkative. Having studied from me you venture to ask the meaning of these verses from me as if we are ignorant and you are learned. But just see, each of the previous Prophets could not be God in the real sense, because they were not innocent while our Lord Jesus Christ was sinless and innocent and therefore he was also God.

Isabella: We are not talking of sin or innocence. The question is that Jesus Christ called himself God as other Prophets were called. If Jesus Christ was really God, then we have to admit that every other "Prophet was also God. Besides, in these verses Jesus Christ was replying to the accusations of the Jews. If he were really the son of God, he would have accepted the accusations of Jews.

Michael: Oh! How great! you are such a great scholar that you slight us. It is now clear that you have been well grounded. If Jesus Christ was not God but just a man, how could he constitute atonement for our sins. And is any man free from sins?

Isabella: I do not understand how you concoct the rule that no one among men can be innocent, although even in the Bible a man says about Malik Sidq Shalem : "He without father, without mother, without genealogy. Neither is there beginning of his life nor its end. but just as kin to the son of God." [ Ecclesiastes, chapter 7, verse 3]. Then in the Bible it is written about Zacharias and his wife: "And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." [Luke, chapter 1, verse 6.]

So it is clear that Malik Sidq Shalem, Zacharias and his wife were certainly innocent, otherwise the words "just as kin to God" and "blameless" would be meaningless. So innocence of Christ is not unique but he was innocent like other innocent men. As to the case of Atonement this is also not proved from the Bible, for no man can take the load of other man's sins and least of all .taking the load of men's sins on his head and dying on the cross. In fact, Jesus has declared in the Bible that salvation will be on the basis of acts and not by atonement, as it is written: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels; then he shall reward every man according to his works"[Matthew, chapter 16, verse 27.]; "And, behold, one came and said unto him : Good what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life. Christ said: ... If thou wilt enter into life keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false-witness." [Ibid., chapter 19. verses 16-18. t 2 ]. It is proved from these verses that salvation is by acts

alone. Christ did not tell the man that he did not need do anything as he (Christ) would be atonement for him.

Michael: Girl, you seem to have come to teach me. Do you not trust me? I am your teacher. Whatever I say you must believe. By your own wisdom you cannot comprehend the delicate problems of religious law. The question of atonement comes later. First the question of the divinity of Jesus Christ should be settled. See Christ was taken to heaven in life which Muslims also believe. Is it not the proof of his divinity? Jesus Christ exhibited great miracles. He revived the dead, gave sight to the blind. Do not these things prove his divinity? First you must believe or reject divinity of the Lord and then talk of other things.

Isabella: It was you who raised the question of Atonement. So I began to discuss it. If Jesus Christ can be God by being raised to heaven alive, then Eli should also be God as he was also, according to the Bible, raised alive to heaven [Kings, chapter 14, verse 12]. As to the Christ reviving the dead and giving sight to the blind, that also does not prove his divinity as other Prophets had also demonstrated miracles as is clearly mentioned in the Bible. If these miracles can make anyone God, then other Prophets were also God.

Peter: See, how this girl confuses us! O, foolish girl! the miracles shown by other Prophets were not by their own power but by the power of God, while Christ did miracles by his own power, which proves that he was God.

Isabella: In the first place miracles are not proofs about prophethood, to say the least of divinity. That according to the Christian creed it is not necessary that anyone who does miracles is a prophet and when he cannot be even a prophet, how can he be God? Jesus has said: "... I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater work than these shall he do." [2 Kings, chapter 2, verse 12.]

As to your claim that the miracles of Christ were by his own authority while those of others they were by constraint, this is also wrong for the Bible proves that not only in performing miracles but in everything else Jesus was as powerless as other Prophets. And whenever Jesus performed any miracle he first prayed for the help of God. In his miracle of bread and fish he sought the help of God and at another place he said to the Disciples that taking out of souls depended on prayer. Christ revived a dead by praying to God.[See Matthew, 12 : 16 ; Mark. 9 : 29 ; Jonab, 11 : 41]



## Test of Faith

Continuing her talk Isabella said: Christ has no power to perform miracles as it has been proved from the Bible. Now I say that Jesus Christ was as powerless in everything as any other man. If he were God he could not have been so helpless and he would have been free to do anything like the Almighty God and could not have felt the need of seeking the help of others. (Opening the Bible) Jesus Christ says: "Foras the Father has life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to exercise judgment also, because he is the Son of man." [John, 5 : 26-27.] That is even the life of Jesus Christ was not his own but given by God and it was He Who gave him authority to do justice. Without God's grace he could not do even justice and the argument given was that Jesus was human and a human being could not do anything without the help of God. Christ also says: "I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear I judge and my judgment is just." [Ibid., 5:30] Further he said: "I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me." [Ibid. 6:38] Thus it is proved that Christ was quite powerless like other men, and who is dependent on others cannot be God, and so Jesus also was not God.

Peter (to Michael): Do you see how unbending is this girl ? Muslims have taught her well to become so talkative. Now, can you believe that she will come to the right path? I think it is useless to have any further talk with her as she has lost faith and has become very disobedient.

Michael: I am also convinced that she is wholly under the control of Satan. (To Isabella :) All the arguments produced by you have obvious replies and you have also read them in the lessons on theology. There are also other replies which you cannot understand at all. Now, instead of replying to you, I should like to hear your ideas so that we can come to the decision easily about you. You have clearly stated your views about the Divinity of Christ and Atonement. Now what have you to say further?

Isabella: I have neither denied the Bible nor Jesus Christ. But what I say is that, according to the teaching of the Bible, neither Christ is proved to be God, nor any basis of atonement. All this is the invention of Christians.

Michael: It means that all Christians are liars and all Christians have united against the Holy Bible. Accursed and hellish girl, if you cannot understand anything, just accept the judgment of your elders. Does your father, who is the head priest and has full authority to pardon sins, also consider these things wrong ? Are all his popes, monks, Christian divines and savants of Christianity on the wrong path?

Isabella: Just as the Bible does not prove the Divinity of Christ and Atonement, in the same way the Christianity of the so-called Christians of today is not established according to the Bible and so their opinions cannot be my guide

.

Michael: Wonderful! That we are unreal and false Christians, and you are a real and true Christian. Unlucky girl, what has become of your senses? You have discarded even your elders. After all what is your proof that we are not true Christians?

Isabella: There is no reason for losing temper. The matter is quite obvious. If you could prove from the Bible that modern Christians are true Christians, then I will wholeheartedly accept their decision and will not press any argument against them from the Bible. So, you just prove from the Bible that Christians of today are true Christians.

Michael: There are Christians all over the world, and you say that they are not Christians according to the Bible. What is its proof? Is it not proof enough that we believe in the Bible, in the Divinity of Jesus and his crucifixion?

Isabella: Do not Muslims believe in the Bible? Can you call them Christians? As to believe in the Divinity of Christ and Atonement, it is not any argument for Christianity. On the other hand, it proves that such persons are not at all Christians as there is no trace of such beliefs in the Bible.

Peter : O worthless girl, why are you doubting our Christianity? If we are not Christians, then it is for you to give proof of true Christians. Just say where in the world do real and true Christians live.

Isabella : You may be as much angry as you like, but the truth cannot be concealed. If you want the proof from me, then I declare candidly that Christians of today are not at all followers of Christ, and who can be a true Christian I am prepared to prove from the Bible itself.

Michael: O accursed girl, why talk and talk ? Why not come out with your proof?

Isabella : Well, then, listen. The signs of the true Christians are mentioned in the Bible as follows: "And these signs shall follow them that believe. In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." [Mark, 16 : 17-18.] At another place the sign of the believing Christian is stated as follows: "Then came the disciples to Jesus and said, Why could we not cast him [evil spirit] out ? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief, for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say upon this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place ; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." [Matthew. 17 : 19-20.]

Now, from these two passages of the Bible, the following six signs of Christians have been established:

- (1) driving out evil spirits
- (2) speaking new languages without learning them
- (3) lifting up poisonous snakes

- (4) taking the cup of poison without injury
- (5) curing the sick by the touch of their hand and
- (6) moving away mountains.

So, anyone who claims to be a Christian must first prove these six signs in him. You are also a Christian. Leave aside all the six signs and cure a sick man with your touch; mountain, of course, you cannot move. Here is just a stone; move it away only ten or twenty yards, so that your Christianity is proved by the Bible.

Michael: True, it is all in the Bible, but where is it written that anyone who is unable to do such miracles is not a Christian? Besides, all these signs are peculiar to Disciples and not to Christians in general

Isabella : Both these statements are wrong. The Bible clearly says that any Christian who has an atom of faith in him will move away the mountain by his bidding. It follows that anyone who has not even an atom of faith in him will not be able to move the mountain. Then it is also wrong to say that these signs are for the Disciples only as it is clearly said in the Bible that these miracles will be among the believers. If these signs are intended for the Disciples only, then belief is also for the Disciples only which means that no true Christian was born after the Disciples.

Peter: Unlucky girl, that is why I say that you cannot understand the mysteries and inner meanings of the Bible. Foolish girl, these miracles relate to spiritual matters, that is, by illness is meant spiritual illness, poison means disbelief which means that Christians, even if they are attacked by unbelievers, will not degrade from faith and so on.

Isabella: Just think before you reply. You call me foolish; the cap may fit on you. Look, Jesus Christ says: "He that believeth on me the works that I do shall he do also." [ John, 14 : 12.] If by miracles is meant spiritual matters, then it will follow that Christ neither revived a dead, nor did he give sight to the blind, nor cured a sick, but he just cured spiritually dead, exorcised the evil spirits, and created in them the light of faith. But you people will never admit this interpretation about Christ. Then why do you concoct this new rule for others ? Christ said: "the works that I do," so whatever he did and in whatever manner, believers should also do and in the same manner, otherwise they will not be believers.

Peter: It is difficult to make this unbelieving girl understand. Her remedy is not exhortation but the same punishment which the Inquisition decides (after whose decision the guilty is tied to the stock). (To Michael.) You turn her out of the house and tell holy father (the head priest) that she is past remedy and some other device must be adopted.

Michael and Peter then rose and went to another room and consulted among themselves. Michael's daughter Mirano told Isabella to leave at once otherwise there might be trouble for her there. But it was agreed that Isabella and her friends must assemble at the famous garden of Cordova in the evening and think about the future. Isabella went out of

Michael's house and took the way to her home. But although she was going to her house her steps faltered and she pondered as to what was she going to meet at her home.

Anyhow she reached her home and, on the insistence of her mother, also ate something, but in the worried state of her mind she could not decide about her future and, waiting for the evening, she retired to her room. She looked at her library and other things and cast gloomy eyes at every corner of the house fearing that she might have to leave it. Who will use her things and read her books, she thought. So thinking she abruptly alerted and said: Let anyone live in this house and use my things and read my books. I was in search of truth, which I have got. My Allah has guided me. Thousands of thanks to Him Who has granted me the wealth of truth and nothing could be greater than it. Thousands of such houses may be sacrificed for the boon of Islam. So saying she fell down to prostrate and thank the Almighty Allah.

### **Isabella's Prayer**

Evening came after anxious waiting and Isabella started for the garden of Cordova well in time. On the way she met Michael's daughter, Mirano, who also accompanied her and her other two friends, who had listened to the talk at Michael's house, also joined them in the garden.

Mirano: Isabella, there is great sorrow on your face. Why? You have to part some day from your relatives.

Isabella: I was in great plight after I parted from you. But luckily my mother, being engaged in other things, could not come to me, otherwise Heaven knows what trouble she would have caused. But now by Allah's Grace I am not worried but prepared to bear all troubles for the sake of truth.

Mirano: But, sister, you were wonderful today, you gave such crushing replies to priests that they were flabbergasted and could not reply, and moreover whatever you argued was from the Bible.

Mertha (the other friend) : But what is strange is that despite being silenced they do not confess.

Mirano : They may not confess by mouth but their hearts do believe. After you left my father Michael said to Peter: It is true that the divinity of Christ is not proved by the Bible, but anyway we have to abide by the judgment of the Church. Father Peter was convinced of the weight of your arguments and said that your arguments were not weak.

Mertha : But today's discussion proved that Islam is a true and firm religion while in Christianity there is nothing but misguidance.

Mirano (to Isabella): Would you like to leave your parents, brothers, sisters and relatives, and the life of ease and comfort? And what will you do if your father is strict on you and gives you up to the Inquisition?

Isabella: I have now freed my mind from all these worries. Allah Who has conferred on me the boon of Islam will also help me in future and will not discard my good cause. I find great solace in the verse of the Quran which says: "Whosoever has fear of Allah in him, then Allah will provide for him the means to find the path of salvation and give him sustenance from quite unexpected quarters."

Mirano: Well, when shall we go to meet Ziad b. Umar and his company? Isabella : We have to go there a little early so as to benefit by the company of respected Ziad as much as possible and return home in time. Mirano: Will you report to respected Ziad the events of today?

Isabella : Why not? But let us go now so that we may reach there at the time of isha (early night prayer) and return after staying there for an hour.

Coming out of the garden of Cordova Isabella, accompanied by her friends, took her way to the great Mosque of Cordova and on the way Isabella informed her friends that, although in her heart she has become a Muslim, she has not been formally converted. She would now take the pledge at the blessed hands of Ziad b. Umar, so that Allah may grant her more courage and firmness and take in her heart the full measure of Allah's help. All her friends congratulated her on her good intention and expressed their pleasure also. Half an hour after this, the girls entered the inner part of Umar Lahmi's house, which adjoined the house of Ziad b. Umar, who had already been informed of their visit by Umar Lahmi. So after isha prayer divines, devotees, traditionists, poets, men of letters, academicians and eminent scholars assembled there. After formal talk Umar Lahmi asked Ziad b. Umar's permission to bring the girls to his presence, and on getting permission the girls were called from Umar Lahmi's house.

As soon as the girls arrived Ziad asked about their welfare. Isabella narrated to him the happenings of the last two days with her father, the head priest, and other priests and also the talk she had had with Michael and Peter on different subjects and also the arguments which she had put before them. The learned men present there applauded her achievement and greatly encouraged her. All were impressed by the profound knowledge of Isabella.

Isabella (to Ziad b. Umar): Respected sir, this has all passed and whatever comes after will be seen, but now my request is that you formally convert me to Islam and include me in the universal brotherhood of the believers of one God. So Ziad b. Umar formally converted her and all those present prayed sincerely for her firmness.

Ziad b. Umar: Daughter Isabella, now that you have formally embraced Islam, you should put a veil on your face as Islam enjoins concealment of the woman's face. In future you should always be veiled. At the same time five times of prayer are incumbent on you and see that it is never missed as this is the only door to felicity. Well, are these girls with you the same whom you had mentioned ?

Isabella: Yes, one of them is the daughter of Michael, whose name is Mirano, and the other two are my friends and confidantes. Their names are Mertha and Hanana.

Ziad: Have they any doubt about Islam?

Isabella: They have no doubt about the truth of Islam and, like me, they believe in it and when Allah wishes they will formally declare their Islam, yet Mirano has some doubts which my spiritual father, Umar Lahmi, will resolve. She will come here some time and present her doubts and have satisfaction.

Umar Lahmi: It appears from your father's attitude that he will be strict with you and it will not be surprising if he secretly hands you over to the Inquisition. By the morning

Michael and Peter will report to him the details of your debate after which he is sure to antagonise you. Now, what remedy have you thought of it ?

Isabella : Allah knows better what is going to happen in future. I have submitted my case to Allah. Yet I have resolved that if he is more oppressive I will come over to your house.

Umar Lahmi: You may do this whenever you like; anyway you have to do this sometime, for Christians are not so broadminded as not to oppress you and leave you free when they find that you have accepted Islam.

Isabella (to Zia'd b. Umar): Respected sir, you pray for me that Allah may grant me endurance and firmness. Now permit us to leave.

Ziad b. Umar and others present said goodbye to the girls and, after leaving the place, Isabella and her three friends got to their respective homes.

Isabella slept in a corner of her house and, long before dawn, when she woke up, she could not leave her bed. While still in bed the voice of Allah-o-Akbar reached her ears and made her quite restless, while the idea of Glory and Grandeur of Allah and His Awe and Might filled her eyes and tears began to fall from them. Getting some solace after weeping she fell in prostration and with all humbleness prayed to the Creator of the earths and heavens: "O Allah! grant me Thy love and Thy most loved one. O Allah ! fill my heart with the light of Islam and Tauhid (Unity) and make the obedience of Thy Apostle my fate in life. O Allah! I am so grateful to Thee for conferring on me the honour of following the Mercy of the Worlds.O Allah! grant my parents, my relatives and all Christians and the misguided ones the blessings of Islam and let us all live and die on Islam. O my Lord! just grant this humble prayer of the oppressed one, for Thou art the hearer and the seer."

After concluding this prayer Isabella felt that her soul had got solace .and a great load had been lifted from her mind. She found that a treasure-house of endurance, firmness and elation had been installed into her heart. She was very happy as she had secured a great wealth like Islam. She was now fearless and bold, for the Tauhid had cast off from her all fears except the fear of Allah.

Isabella's mother was in an unusual great rage. It appeared that Peter and others had conveyed all their talk to her parents and convinced them that she had become an apostate and all the doors of persuasion had closed on her.

## A Conspiracy

While Isabella was in her room, a maidservant gave a letter in her hand which read: "Sister Isabella, I have to talk to you on some important things, so be kind to take the trouble of coming here at once. The matter is very important. You should not delay at all. Just now I am waiting for you anxiously in another house. Please come along with this maidservant. Your sister, Mirano."

Isabella immediately got up to follow the maidservant while suspecting that the letter was not from Mirano, but was a secret conspiracy of the priests. She followed the maidservant on the road which, rounding from the Palace of Martyrs, went straight to Rabat Ramani. At some distance the maidservant turned 10 a lane and entered a grand house and as soon as she entered all the doors were closed and unsuspecting Isabella was taken to another room whose doors were also closed and Isabella was taken to another room whose doors were also immediately closed. Here Isabella suspected that she probably had been taken prisoner. Then two or three monks pushed Isabella to the stairs leading to the underground room. Isabella was perturbed and she realised that she was in the grip of the Inquisition. When she put her feet on the stair a monk gave a hard blow on the back of the poor, delicate girl, and said. O accursed one! why do you not go ahead? See that the fire of Lord Jesus Christ's anger is ready to burn you up. Unlucky girl! you have defamed Christianity and dragged the honour of your father, the head priest, into the mire.

Poor Isabella was silent. Shivering and suffering blows on her back she got down to the underground chamber where human skeletons were lying here and there in all corners and human craniums were hanging on the walls. Going inside the monk lighted a lamp and said to Isabella: Now you have to live here so that you may know the consequences of hostility to Lord Jesus Christ. Unluckily girl (pointing to the skeletons), these have been deputed to chastise you.

Isabella kept silence and felt as if she was in a dream. In the meantime all the monks went out of the cell after locking it and engaged themselves in prayer and devotion in other rooms. After some time Isabella came to her senses and soon realised that she was put to the tortures of being shut up in this chamber of ghosts because of her acceptance of truth.

The day passed somehow and darkness of the night enveloped the world. After eighth part of the night Isabella was taken out of the chamber and was given some parched and ground grain with water to drink. The monks even now continued to snub her. Then Isabella was taken to different rooms of the house where monks were engaged in various devotional exercises. The object of this round was to frighten Isabella by the austerities of monks which might appeal to her conscience. Isabella watched all this with great interest. One person was lying bound up in chains and another person was striking him with a lash. Isabella was terrified at this sight and thought that probably he was also a guilty one like herself. She soon found that it was a method of subduing the self, and self-torture was voluntarily taken up by monks. In the large room of the house there was an idol of Virgin Mary, around which monks and nuns were sitting in meditation. Some



monks were lying along the wall with faces downward and some were sobbing in a corner ; for subduing the self they had not taken food for the last twenty or twenty-one days. Isabella was aware of these things but had not yet actually witnessed these scenes with her own eyes.

An elderly monk said to Isabella: O abandoned girl, if you want to gain salvation, practise such austerities and by these achieve the pleasure of Lord Jesus Christ. Isabella laughed at it and said : Why does God need such austerities ? The purpose of religion is that one should perform the duties which a man has towards other men and serve men, not that he should hang himself in a corner like abat. Further, when, according to you, Jesus has atoned for all Christians, then such austerities are useless. On this the monk's eyes became red with anger, and he struck a fist on the chest of Isabella with full force saying : Hellish girl, you can never be reformed. Go away, sit at your place. You will get your full treatment there.

So the monk again opened the door of the underground chamber and forced poor Isabella inside.

Isabella sat in a corner of the chamber where tons of human bones were scattered and human skeletons all around were creating an awesome spectacle. In the beginning Isabella's mind was somewhat perturbed but soon her senses revived and she was able to think about her past and future affairs. In this fearful and silent house of the dead if there was a slightest sound Isabella looked around perturbed and worried, but soon she brought herself up and began to recite prayers. At last the night ended and in this dark and closed chamber some rays of light entered through some holes. After some time the door of the chamber was opened and a monk brought her out in the large hall of the house here twelve idols of the Disciples of Christ and other martyrs were stalled. Isabella was taken where two very famous priests were sitting, Isabella sat before them. At first a great deal of anger and fire was demonstrated and then preaching began.

They said : Have you become a Muslim? Isabella: Thank Allah, Who gave me the great boon of Islam.

Priest: Leave out the praise of Islam. Just tell me if you want to die an obnoxious death, or do you want to become again worthy of God's grace?

Isabella: After accepting Islam any person becomes worthy of God's grace and no one is more fortunate than the one who is given the luck to accept Islam as this religion alone is the source of God's pleasure and love.

Priest: Do not praise before me a bloody religion like Islam. I just want a reply in two words, whether you like to die or to live a Christian. Reply at once for your fate is to be decided today.

Isabella: What tribulations Christian martyrs had not suffered in the very beginning, but did they renounce the truth? They were burnt alive, thrown before tigers and lions, cut into two by saw and yet they held on to the truth.

If for the sake of truth anyone has to meet death, it will be the means of having God's pleasure and satisfaction of his conscience. Since I am on the right, nothing on earth, even death, can make me deviate from it. The Holy Quran has taught me that "My prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are surely for Allah, the Lord of the worlds—no associate has He." I have been enjoined to remain firm on it, and I am among those devotees.

Priest: That is, you do not want to give up Islam and enter into the grace of Lord Jesus Christ, Well, then your fate will be decided today.

Isabella: Whatever decision you like you may make about me with your heart's content. The utmost you can do is to take my life, but you do not know that the Being to Whom I am related is Allah, Who lives for ever.

Priest: When death will confront you, you will forget all these verses of the Quran and Allah, etc. We shall see if the Quran or Prophet Muhammad saves you from death,

Isabella: The same problem was put by the Jews before Jesus Christ that if he was on the right, he should come down from the scaffold and save his life. Now either (Allah forbid!) Christ was wrong that, according to you, he could not save himself from death, or you are in the footsteps of Jews.

Priest: O devil, hellish, evil-minded, worthless, unlucky! you call me a Jew! Now keep quite and wait for your end.

Isabella: It will be better if you also keep quiet and leave me alone and do yourself whatever you please.

Priest (to monks): Lock up this girl in the underground chamber, do not give her any food or drink. Holy Father (Isabella's father) has ordered that she should be given over to the Inquisition and her fate will be decided tomorrow.

On this the monks caught hold of Isabella forcefully pushing and beating her, and carried her out of the room. Outside the room the beating was harder and numerous. Isabella fell and got up. At last she was thrown in the underground chamber and locked up.

Now three days had passed in this confinement and Isabella was not even once taken out. But she was so happy and complacent as if angels of firmness and stability were deputed for her. In the solitude of the night human skeletons made the atmosphere quite fearsome, while monks and nuns were engaged in austerities ; their weeping and cries reached Isabella's ears.

In the meantime Isabella's friends (Mirano, Mertha and Hanana) had also learnt that Isabella had been fraudulently called and thrown into the underground chamber of a monastery and was being subjected to great tortures. Then they consulted together and

decided to inform Umar Lahmi and Ziad b. Umar. One night they went to the assembly of Ziad b. Umar and narrated the whole episode which greatly excited the Muslims who were present there.

One person: By Allah, if we continue to remain so tolerant Christians will put great obstruction in the propagation of Islam. Isabella is now our sister in Islam and it is the duty of every Muslim to release her from the grip of Christians at whatever cost.

Another person (drawing his sword): By your permission I can go at once and release Isabella. It is a pity that while our sister is under such tortures we sit silent even now which is a great injustice.

Umar Lahmi: Brothers, excitement and outbursts will not do. The case is now before Hazrat Ziad b. Umar and we shall do whatever he orders.

All (to Ziad b. Umar): Well, sir, whatever you order we are ready to carry it out.

Ziad b. Umar : My advice to you is that you should not show any excitement as it will cause the death of poor Isabella. If we like we can get her released by sending a contingent of our army, but it is expedient to take a strategic action. If Isabella is in trouble it will InshaAllah (God willing) strengthen her faith and the fact is that the worth of Islam is realised in the taste of tribulations.

Umar Lahmi (to Mirano, Mertha and Hanana): Now say what is your opinion and how far you can help our sister Isabella.

Mirano : If we are allowed and the matter is left to us we can easily relieve Isabella from the trouble.

Umar Lahmi: Thank you very much.

Ziad b. Umar: You have our permission to do whatever you can in your own way to get Isabella released.

The three girls, making firm promises, sought permission to depart. They left and went to their respective homes. The plan of releasing Isabella remained under discussion all the way.

## **A Complete Change**

One day Mirano, Mertha and Hanana went to the head priest and told him that as Isabella was their classmate and was also amenable to their advice, so if they were permitted to talk to her they might be able to bring her back to the Christian fold. This last chance of persuasion might be given them and they had ninety-nine per cent hope that they would succeed. Holy father, they said : Isabella is a piece of our heart and we will not spare any effort to persuade her. So let us go to the monastery and talk to her.

Head priest: Let that accursed girl go to hell. She has become very hard-hearted and Lord Jesus Christ has cut her off. I am afraid she may not lead astray even you.  
Mirano; Well, there is no harm in making a last effort of persuasion. If she comes round, well and good, otherwise you may give her whatever punishment you like.

Head priest: Very well, I give you permission to go to the monastery on condition that you should talk in the presence of two monks so that the accursed may not misguide you, and you may not be influenced by her apostasy. Now go and tomorrow evening you may go to the monastery. I am writing to the monk for it today.

After getting permission Mirano, Mertha and Hanana returned pleased and began to make preparations to leave their homes for ever, as the plan they had conceived was such that they would also have to leave their homes along with Isabella. Anyway they prepared for their permanent departure with great care and precaution and before the time of their leaving for the monastery they informed Ziad b. Umar and Umar Lahmi asking for their help in that enterprise.

After all preparations had been made the three friends came out of their houses and met at an appointed place and at the time given by the head priest they started for the monastery. The head priest had written to the manager of the monastery that these friends of Isabella were going to make a last effort to reconvert Isabella at a specified time and they should be allowed to enter the monastery and given necessary help. Maybe by persuasion of her friends Isabella might see the light. So when these girls reached the monastery the monks and nuns welcomed them cordially and thought that to give guidance to Isabella Jesus Christ had sent his Virgin Mother in the form of these girls and that the help of all saints was with them. Entering the monastery the three girls sat down before the statue of Virgin Mary and a group of monks surrounded them.

A nun (to Mirano) : Blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ may be with you and God may give you success in your mission. You know that some devil has misguided this unlucky girl, Isabella. How good and learned was the girl! May God destroy the devil, what pious people he has seduced!

Another nun : Virgin Mary's shadow be over you. By the Deliverer, you will certainly succeed in your mission. Your beautiful faces assure your success. If Lord Jesus Christ's

grace again supports Isabella it will be a great feat of yours. The news has spread all over Cordova and all Christians have been humbled.

Third nun : By God, just last night I saw girls of your features in my dream who were sitting in the lap of Virgin Mary and on the other side Lord Jesus Christ was indicating by gestures that the honour of the church will be established through these girls. When the monks heard of this dream they cried: It is these girls.

Chief monk: Isabella is locked up in the underground chamber and her hands and feet are chained. The accursed girl is so hard-hearted that the severer the punishment, the more she applauds Islam and in this condition she does not hesitate even to preach to us. Now when do you propose to go to her ?

Mirano: Our idea is to talk to her calmly and explain to her the truth of Christian creed, but on condition that except one or two monks none others should be with us. Now that the sun is about to set, after three hours of the night you may bring her here so that we may induce her to pray and practise austerities. Possibly there will be no need thereafter to persuade her and by the blessing of Virgin Mary (pointing to the statue) her heart will be opened for the crucified God.

Chief monk: Whatever you order we are ready to carry out. I am directing all the monks not to interfere in your prayers and keep away from you.

Mirano : Thank you very much, but first let us meet Isabella in the underground chamber and after some usual talk exclusively on personal matters bring her here. (Pointing to the statue of Virgin Mary) Look, the Mother of our Lord is quite ready to take Isabella in her arms and it is hoped that Isabella will not refuse to go to her arms.

Thereafter the monk and the three girls went towards the underground chamber, the lock was opened and all were lost in darkness.

Hanana : Oho ! How dark !

Monk: I am lighting the lamp. You just go a little ahead, but be careful not to stumble for many skeletons are scattered all over here.

The monk lighted the lamp. When Isabella saw her three friends she was overjoyed. While Mirano, Mertha and Hanana had not yet seen her, Isabella loudly called the Muslim salutation of peace.

Monk : O unlucky accursed girl! Just yesterday you got so much beating for it, yet you do not take lesson and reform yourself.

All the girls suddenly laughed on hearing the call of Muslim salutation of peace, but when they came nearer their eyes became wet on seeing Isabella bound in chains.

Mirano : How do you do, Isabella ? How is life here? Did you realise what is the punishment of rejecting the truth?

Isabella (smiling): You are right, sister, for the sake of truth people have even gone to the gallows.

Mirano: We have not come here to discuss with you but to adopt your creed.

On this all the girls laughed loudly and the two monks also could not suppress their laughter.

Mirano: Isabella, after all how long you will continue to remain in the grip of satan? Just see how the Christians all over Cordova are perturbed on your apostasy!

Isabella: There is no other way of protection from satan except by accepting Islam. It is only this strong fort from the cover of which man can successfully confront all satanic powers. It is a vain thought that only by becoming a Christian one can save oneself from the grip of satan. You have read the Bible and should know that even holy Disciples could not escape satan's grip and even Jesus Christ called some of his Disciples satan. When these Disciples who, according to you, were trained under the direct supervision of Jesus Christ, could not escape from satan's strong hold, how can Christians of today save themselves from satan ? But the Quran says that satan cannot even touch the devoted servants of Allah.

Mirano: You have again started the same discussion in which you have been defeated by the priests (laughing) and by God's grace we have emerged successful. So you should stop this religious discussion and just look to your tortures. O Isabella! it is God's punishment to you that now, being the daughter of the head priest of Cordova, you sleep on the bed of thorns and your hands and feet are chained. For God's sake, take pity on yourself.

Isabella: If truth could be given up to avoid troubles, then early Christian martyrs would not have tasted martyrdom. If troubles come only on untruth, then most of the Christians who were the pride of the church would be counted to be on the wrong. In fact, your talk has tortured me more than what I suffer on the bed of thorns and grip of chains. Did you come here to give me torture over torture ?

Mirano (to the monk): Isabella can never be defeated by discussion. Her only remedy is that tonight we include her in our prayer and devotion before the idol of Virgin Mary. You will see that this very night she will be completely transformed and her heart will be turned towards crucified Christ.

Monk : May Lord Jesus accomplish this, but apparently Isabella's turning to the. truth seems to be very difficult.

Mirano : It is the rule that one who is more hard-hearted will come to the faith more with reality. Just see how unbending the enemy of the Lord Saint Paul was and what tortures the believers suffered at his hands, but this very Saint Paul became the pillar of Christianity and was the greatest recipient of Lord's grace.

Monk: You are right. May Lord Christ may do the same for Isabella and she also joins our fold !

Mirano : Well, now we should go from hers and prepare for the prayer in the same large room. (To the monk :) See, after three hours of the night you should bring Isabella to our room and also depute a nun to be with us to keep a watch over Isabella.

Monk : Very well. Isabella will be brought to you at the appointed time.

Mirano: Can you or any other monk also take the trouble of remaining with us for the night ?

Monk : Most surely. But you know that all the night we are engaged in prayer and remembrance of God.

Mirano : Well, just as you like, and there is no need either. But at the time of the morning talk as arranged, you will be with us.

Monk : In the morning not only myself but other monks also will listen to your talk.

Mertha : If Lord Jesus wills, the object will be gained during the night and there will be no need of any talk.

Mertha said this in a tone that, except the monk, all others understood its implication.

Thereafter Mertha, Hanana and Mirano along with the monk came out of the underground chamber and reached the large room of the monastery. The monk locked the underground chamber. After dinner and toilet Mirano, Mertha and Hanana took another round of the monastery and talked to monks and nuns who began preparations for the night vigil. These girls returned to their room. The purpose of the round of the monastery and talk to monks and nuns was to find out a nun who was the greatest devotee and they found out a nun of this type and also the time of the night when she used to engage herself in prayer. Now three hours of the night were about to pass and these girls were talking quietly. At last the door of the large room opened and the same chief monk entered when the girls stood up to pay him respect as he was chief of the monks. The monk informed the girls that Isabella was being taken out of the underground chamber and brought to them as arranged and soon a nun would also be sent to them.

Mirano : Please send here the nun who is most devoted to prayer in the night and is also saintly. Is there any such nun in the monastery?

Monk : All the nuns that are here are devotees and practise all kinds of austerities for the sake of Lord Jesus, but there is one among them whose name is Arkia who is the most pious devotee, recipient of Divine revelations and performer of miracles. About her family it is enough to say that she is a Princess of France and has given up her riches and royalty for the sake of Virgin Mary.

Mirano : So our object is gained. We needed such a nun who could influence Isabella with her spirituality. Does she also perform miracles?

Monk: Her miracles are known far and wide. Have you never heard about it ? You may just take this that she drinks the cup of poison and is not at all affected. Once a very dangerous and poisonous snake entered the monastery and fell at the feet of Arkia. This I saw myself.

Mirano: God's name be glorified! The work is done. Now, you please go and send Isabella to us.



## Princess of France

Soon after Isabella was taken to the large room in which her friends were sitting and the monk informed them that Princess Arkia would come shortly after finishing her preliminary prayer and then he left. Now Mirano, Mertha and Hanana found the opportunity to talk secretly to Isabella. They had full talk about their present situation and various plans were discussed about releasing Isabella. It was put to Isabella that, in order to be relieved of her permanent troubles, she should temporarily become a Christian. But Isabella spurned at the suggestion and said that whatever trouble came to her in connection with Islam they would InshaAllah (God willing) be an atonement for her sins and strengthen the faith, and if God wanted her to be released from the clutches of these oppressors, He will provide means for it, otherwise God's Will be done. After full discussion a plan was thought out on which all agreed and, after making up their minds, the girls engaged in prayer. Isabella's prayer was simply this verse of the Quran: "My Fosterer, take me in with truth." Mirano began to recite salutations to the Prophet and other girls recited prayer appropriate to the occasion. Then the door opened and the Princess of France came in. She was welcomed by all.

Arkia: I am very sorry that Isabella has left the fold of the Lord and has allied herself with apostasy. I wonder why Satan has possessed her. Just last night I have seen in my dream that eminent Muslim divines were burning in Hell and this unlucky girl also wants to join them. If she takes up the Cross of the Lord again on her shoulders and lives with me just for a few days I will let her see the Lord.

Mirano: Surely it is most shameful that the daughter of the spiritual father has thus become an apostate. This is why we have brought her to you today that you may influence her with your spiritual powers, and bring her back at the feet of the Lord. She could not be silenced by argument, but now it is necessary to convert her by spiritual influence.

Arkia: Very well. Just today an effort will be made by prayer and austerities to turn Isabella towards Virgin Mary and I am sure that she will come round by the morning. I quite see that the Lord is waiting for Isabella with open arms and Isabella is also ready to go into his arms. You may not worry. Just see what happens by the morning. (Here Isabella wanted to say something but Mertha beckoned her to keep quiet.)

When Arkia had spoken of her miracles, the door opened again and the same chief monk entered and, addressing Mirano, asked her if she needed some more nuns. Mirano thanked him and said that she did not need any more but requested him that if he could come once or twice in the night and give them his advice it will be very good of him. The monk promised to look them up after every two hours and would carry out all their requests, and then left and the door was closed.

Now there was just half an hour for the midnight and the girls sat down for prayer along with Arkia who sat before the statue of Virgin Mary. The girls took their places ten paces

apart from one another. Mirano took up her seat near Isabella so that if she wanted to convey something important she could do that easily and others might not know it.

After an hour was spent in prayer Mirano whispered to Isabella: Look here. You should not interrupt me whatever I say, but just listen quietly and accept what I say. Arkia in her zeal of sainthood did very curious things, sometimes she extended her hands as if trying to take someone in her arms, sometimes she wept and sometimes cried painfully and uttered again and again: Yes, yes. Your Lord may bless you. The Holy Ghost may soon help us. At about one in the night Mirano raised an outcry and feigned faint. Isabella sat stiffly at her seat, but Arkia, Mertha and Hanana rushed to Mirano and wanted to revive her by sprinkling water but Arkia stopped them saying that Mirano had certainly seen the Lord and their prayer of that day would surely end in success

. Do not worry, she said, it is our good fortune that the Lord has come to our monastery. (Going near Isabella) Well, Isabella, do you still hesitate in lifting the Cross of our Lord ? Isabella did not reply and continued to listen in silence. Isabella's silence further convinced Arkia that the Lord had surely descended there and cast his blessing eyes on Isabella. Mirano still continued in her swoon when the chief monk entered the room and was perturbed to see Mirano faint and cried : Oh! what has happened ? Arkia promptly narrated the story of her superstition and said with firm faith that the Lord had descended on Isabella which the monk immediately confirmed as he already believed in the saintliness of Arkia. At last with great effort Mirano was revived and regained her senses.

Chief monk: Well, Mirano, how are you ? Give us some good tidings.

Mirano (pointing to Arkia) : It is all the manifestation of her saintliness and blessing. With her. attention she made me see the Lord.

Arkia: Lord be glorified! Blessed be the name of crucified Christ!

Monk: Well, well! What did you see ?

Mirano: I was absorbed in prayer when I saw a very handsome and graceful person rushing towards me and he looked in truth at Isabella and smiled.

Monk: Congratulation, congratulation.

Mirano : I was intently looking at the person when he turned towards me. I saw a mark on his face on which was written "The Holy Ghost" with light letters. (Here Isabella was suddenly forced to laugh but she suppressed it by coughing.)

Arkia: O Lord ! Glorified be Thy Name!

Mirano: Then he took out a phial and poured a few drops on the head of Isabella.

Monk: Surely, they were drops of faith. Isabella, your luck has brightened.

Mirano: Thereafter the Holy Ghost told me two things. . . .

Monk: Say what these two things were.

Mirano : He said that there is a sacred Church in the southern part of Cordova which is now-a-days deserted and in which bones of holy saints are preserved for pilgrims and seekers of blessings. I am going there. Look, the Lord is waiting for you there with extended arms to confer blessings.

Arkia: Crucified Lord! Thy Name be glorified. By holy Mary! how lucky is the revelation. And I had seen the Lord the moment I came here. Do you see how Mirano's revelation has confirmed what I said.

Monk : Now say what was the other thing which the Holy Ghost said.

Mirano : The other thing. . . .

Monk : Yes.

Mirano : The other thing is not to be told here, as I have been so enjoined.

Monk : Did the Holy Ghost ask you not to reveal it ?

Mirano : Yes, He told me not to reveal it before others.

Monk : At least tell me if it was about some person or some work ?

Mirano : I can say this much that it was about you, holy father. How could I know that your position is so exalted before the Lord ?

Since the monks and Roman Catholic Christians are very superstitious and easily led to believe, the monk believed it at once and jump-ed in joy and on hearing from Mirano "How could I know that you have so exalted a position before the Lord ?" Arkia fell at the feet of the monk and began to rub her forehead on them while the monk in the ecstasy of joy stood motionless and could only say to her: Daughter, have patience ! You will also be with me in Paradise.

So two hours passed in this demonstration of jubilations when Arkia addressed the monk.

Arkia : What should we do ?

Monk: To seek our Lord we should go to the place indicated to Mirano. (To Isabella:) Look, O girl, truly it is due to you that the Holy Ghost has descended on us today. Surely

just on meeting the Lord you will become a saint and kings will seek blessing at your feet.

Mirano : Is it necessary for us to go to that old Church indicated by the Holy Ghost ?

Monk: Simple girl, have you still any hesitation when the Holy Ghost has ordered that we should reach there before morning.

Mirano: Well, then, lock up Isabella in the underground chamber and prepare to start.

Monk: Why ! Should we leave the very person behind for whom the Holy Ghost has descended here and given us the honour of seeing the Lord ? Look, Isabella has received a special grace of God, just as Holy Peter, despite being the bitterest enemy of the Lord, was the recipient of a special grace. So get up, take Isabella with you and go to the Church.

Hanana : If Isabella slips away on the way ? Monk (laughing) : Strange! Has the Lord called us to his presence for nothing ? As if he is not aware of even this that the person whom he has called will slip away.

Arkia : I think we should not delay now for the Holy Ghost has directed that we should reach there soon. (Looking at the sky:) See I am already seeing the Holy Ghost. O Lord ! glory to thy Name ! (All join in a loud cry :) O Lord! glory to thy Name!

Monk : Well, I am asking the donkeys of the monastery to be brought and you prepare in the meantime. The donkeys are very fast runners and will take you to the Church in half an hour.

The monk then called some servants and ordered them to bring the donkeys. The order was promptly carried out, but he kept his departure a secret. The monk was very happy that Isabella, immediately on reaching there, on seeing the Lord would lift up the Cross of Christ and the holy father (Isabella's father) would be struck with wonder on seeing this miracle. Now, they were all ready to start and Isabella, Hanana, Mertha, Mirano, Arkia and the monk mounted on fast running donkeys and, at the instruction of Mirano, Isabella was kept in the middle as a precaution. In a quarter of an hour's time they reached the Church of Saint Peter. In this Church the bones of the martyrs, renowned in Christianity, were preserved and Christian women from distant places came on pilgrimage to receive blessings.

There was yet a long time for the dawn to appear and the awesome atmosphere of the Church filled the hearts of all with awe. Immediately on entering the Church Arkia and the monk prostrated before a large skeleton and began to cry aloud as they hoped that before the morning they will see the Lord and the Holy Ghost will embrace them.

While there was weeping in the dead of the night on the one side, Isabella and her three friends were devising their own plans. Suddenly all the four fell upon the monk who was

prostrating and weeping before a skeleton and two of them caught his hands and the other two his feet and taking out a rope and rags concealed in their pockets tightly bound the monk's feet and thrust rags in his mouth. On this sudden and unexpected attack the poor fellow could not even cry for help. Arkia was prostrating before another skeleton, hoping to see the Lord. After securing safely the monk they went to Arkia and whispered in her ear: Come, holy sister! we will show you the Lord.

Arkia, full of zeal, at once rose and when she approached the helpless monk, she cried in anguish : What is this?

Isabella : This is your Lord to see whom you came here.

Then the girls warned Arkia of her future and preached Islam to her and said that if she wanted to see the soul of truth and the perfect man she should recite, La ilaha ill Allah Muhammad Rasulullah [There is none worthy of worship except Allah and Muhammad is His Apostle]; otherwise she would never be able to see her imaginary Lord till the Dooms Day. So saying the four girls mounted on the fast running donkeys and quickly left the Church.

After their departure Arkia stood transfixed as if she had lost her wit and senses. At last in the dim light of candles, the monk beckoned to her of his plight and Arkia first took out the rags from his mouth and released his hands and feet.

Hearing his outcries other pilgrims also came up, but Isabella and her friends were nowhere to be seen.

Isabella with her three friends (Mertha, Hanana and Mirano) coming out of the Church of Saint Peter mounted their fast running donkeys and driving them with all speed soon reached Umar Lahmi's house and informed him and other Muslim divines of all that had happened. Ziad b. Umar was also intimated of these interesting details. All the Muslims were astonished on the wisdom and tact of Mirano and congratulated the four guests on their release from Christian oppression. The four girls came to the meeting of Ziad b. Umar which assembled after early night prayer at which other eminent divines, philosophers, medical practitioners, interpreters of the Holy Quran, traditionists, and historians were present. As nearly all Muslims were aware of the affairs of Isabella and every second or third day Umar Lahmi was informed of the day-to-day happenings, all with great joy were anxious to hear their stories.

## **A Secret Meeting**

Before giving proceedings of this and other meetings let us have a look at the Church of Saint Peter and the monastery and see what happened to the monk of the monastery and its nun, and how the head priest (Isabella's father) and Michael (Mirano's father) received the news and what situation was created among the Christians of Cordova.

It so happened that when these four girls left the Church of Saint Peter, the poor monk was lying bound up and since he was gagged by a wad of rags he could not speak. The nun took out the rags from his mouth and released his hands and feet. But even after release he continued to be out of his senses and the nun ran about for help.

Pilgrims, living in chambers, on hearing the noise, wrung their hands and, as usual, began to cry before the skeletons of saints. When the mourning ended and the monk and the nun composed themselves they took two donkeys of pilgrims and rode to the monastery. On reaching the monastery all the monks and nuns of the monastery came out to receive them, but when they found marks of humility, repentance and defeat on their faces they were thunder-struck. One of those present, however, taking courage, came forward and spoke to the monk.

The man: Respected sir, the holy father (head priest) has sent this letter and directed that it should be replied at once.

Monk (beating his breast) : Alas ! how can I show my face to the holy father. Alas ! the accursed satan has deceived me: the satan who did not spare even the Lord without putting him to trial. Wretched Isabella! and O accursed girls! abomination on you and O daughter of satan! you yourself became an apostate and put us also to shame. O God ! Thou seest what treatment has been meted out to Thine devoted servants.

All the monks of the monastery were struck dumb on hearing this and looked at one another speechless. The monk then with trembling hands opened the letter of the holy father and read. It said : "In order to persuade Isabella her three friends have gone to the monastery as I had informed you. I think the reconversion of Isabella is difficult. If her condition is yet unchanged, then hand her over to the Inquisition for this purpose. I will send to you some men in the evening to whom you should hand over the girl. Now you should send back the other three girls lest the devil may mislead them also and they fall not into the trap of Isabella."

On reading this the monk began to weep and cry loudly. After some time he spoke: What reply can I give to this letter ? I will myself go to the holy father and tell him how satan has put pious people to trial. So saying he stood up and walked out and took with him the saintly nun of France. Meeting the holy father at his house, he narrated the whole episode which the head priest quickly heard and then asked.

Head priest: When I had directed you to keep a careful watch on Isabella, why did you fall in the trap of the girls and believing in their false revelation left the monastery? If such a situation had arisen, why did you not inform me?

Monk : What reply can I give? Surely I have been at fault and fell into satan's trap.

Head priest: But tell me now what other monks were in conspiracy with the girls.

Monk : No one else was in the conspiracy and as a precaution I did not tell anyone. Only this nun whose piety is well known was involved in this episode.

Head priest (to his servant): Just go and bring Michael and Peter and tell them they should stop all other work and come to me at once.

The servant left and shortly after Michael and Peter arrived with three other priests, holding their hands on their chests. The head priest spoke, addressing Michael.

Head priest: Your daughter Mirano has gone away with my daughter Isabella.

Michael: What, holy father! What are you talking?

Head priest : Not only Isabella and Mirano, Hanana and Mertha also gave a slip to the people of the monastery.

Michael: Holy father! just say what happened.

The head priest asked the monk to narrate to him the whole episode. The monk with tearful eyes narrated what had happened on which Michael and Peter also wept.

Head priest: Why weep! Curse these filthy souls. The only regret is that Isabella escaped the grip of Inquisition.

Michael: Holy father, this is not an ordinary matter. Christians will be humiliated all over Cordova and we will not be able to face the people.

Head priest: Anyway, try to find out where these girls are now We will set to work about it very soon.

Three days later after one-third of the night had passed all the other priests of Cordova and zealous Christians began to gather in the great Church of Cordova. They were secretly directed to assemble in the great Church. Apparently there was no sign of a large gathering as there was no indication of any preparations for the meeting. People came and quietly and soberly sat in the large hall of the Church in front of the holy altar. This showed that for this special meeting people were secretly invited.

A large cross was fixed on the altar over which Christ hung and below it Virgin Mary sat on her knees demonstrating her obedience. All the walls of the great Church were painted with the figures of saints and disciples, looking like pictures from Roman and Egyptian mythology. Under these walls all those who came took their seats. Nuns, virgins, who were entertainers of pious priests, were also seen in the crowd. The head priest who was chief of this Church and father of Isabella was very cordially receiving all those who came.

With all this there was such silence and solemnity that no one outside of the Church could know what was happening inside. But Muslims were informed even of this secret meeting and this secrecy of priests could not remain a secret. The head priest and Michael, standing at the gate, were directing zealous Christians with gestures to keep silence. But people were coming in streams. Several thousands of Christians had already collected in the Church, but the head priest was waiting for others to come. Under the statue of the crucified Christ, a man said quietly to another near him: Brother, Lord's name be glorified! Here is an envelope which I have to give to the head priest before the meeting begins, but Michael has ordered me to go and bring such and such a person soon. Now I have to carry out this order and so if you take the trouble to give this letter to the head priest as soon as he comes it will be very kind of you.

The other person replied: With great pleasure. You may rest assured that this envelope will be handed over to the holy father the moment he arrives.

The first man said: Thank you very much. And now I am going to do my duty. So saying the man avoiding the look of others quickly went out of the Church.

Now the Church was full of Christians and priests and no others were expected. When all were seated it was ascertained that there was no Muslim in the assembly. Several priests went round and looked carefully at everyone and made sure that there was no Muslim. It was then ordered that all the doors of the Church should be closed and the proceedings of the meeting should begin. Enthusiasm of the Christians was such that if they had not been strictly directed to remain calm and silent, they would have raised a storm. For greater precaution some people were stationed outside so that no one could hear the proceedings of the meeting. When all arrangements were complete the head priest and Michael with ten or twelve priests stood at an elevated place. Just then a man from the front row got up and quietly handed over to the head priest the envelope which a person had given him to be put up to the head priest. Before opening the envelope and reading the letter the head priest spoke in a sober tone : My sons and daughters! today you have been given the trouble to come here for a very important business which father Michael will put up to you and you should listen to his speech calmly and patiently.

So father Michael stood up to make his speech and at the same time the head priest opened the envelope. But when he had read only a few lines he screamed and began to shake all over in anger. All those assembled began to look anxiously at the head priest and father Michael had to stop his speech. After a brief respite the head priest spoke:



Look here! A man has just given me a letter from Isabella in which she has invited all of us to become Muslims. Who has given this envelope to me?

A Christian: Holy father, it was I. A person handed it over to me to put it up before you. . .

The poor man had not yet completed his sentence when there was a storm in the meeting and the man was hit with fists and kicks from all sides. The poor man made every effort to explain that he had no concern with the letter and was innocent, but no one heeded him and at last by so much beating he fell down senseless and was dragged out and shut up in the closet of the Church. The confusion took a long time to subside and with great difficulty.

Then the head priest came forward and spoke : This man appears to be a Muslim who has made his appearance like us and, putting on our holy dress, has come here to spy. Anyway his case will be taken up tomorrow. Now we have to see that the girls about whom this meeting has been held have preached to us a bloody and barbaric [God forbid] religion like Islam. Tell us how we can succeed in bringing them back and what could be done in this connection.

Thereupon Michael came forward and said: Brethren! the purpose for which this secret meeting was held has been made purposeless after this letter of Isabella. What can we do now except to bear it with patience and pray to God that either she comes back to the fold of the Lord or sent to Hell.

The head priest came forward again and said: Anyway just bring this man here. Possibly by being pressed he may reveal some other things, although we know the Muslims are very hot-headed and they do not easily give out their secrets. Yet he is now in our hands and we may possibly force him to speak out.

So the poor man was brought out from the closet of the Church to the stage. The man was not in himself being badly wounded. The head priest on looking at him cried out: O, this is the priest of the northern church and my own nephew. God forbid, he is yet breathing.

So when the poor wounded man was identified all the priests were very sorry. Next day when the man came to himself he told them that a man brought a letter, gave it to him and quickly went out of the Church. After hearing this, all the priests decided that it was a "mischief" of the Muslims and so they lost hope of Isabella and her friends and the secret night meeting was unsuccessful as nothing could be decided in the confusion.

The letter which Isabella had written to her father read as follows :

"All praise to Allah, the Fosterer of the worlds, Who created the earth and the sky and everything in the universe with His absolute power. Thousands of thousands of greetings to that holy and chaste Prophet who came to the world and took out the world from misguidance and darkness to the bright scene of spiritualism and guided us to the right

path which was taken by all Prophets and whose adoption leads us to the nearness of Allah and everlasting peace and security.

"O, my respected father! be it known to you that I have accepted Islam which, according to my deep study, is the only religion which is free from excesses and defects and is the giver of right guidance and salvation. I gave up the Christian religion because it is full of excesses and defects and a contradiction of teachings of all Prophets. Briefly, the following comparison will make the truth clear to you.

"(1) According to Islam, Allah in His Person and Qualities is One without any partner. He is unique and is all goodness and perfection. The Quran says that Allah is one, neither he is the son of anyone, nor has He any son, neither is anyone equal to Him. He is living and will live for ever and is free from sleep, drowsiness or fatigue or any human want. To enumerate His good qualities you should study the Quran.

"(2) On the other hand, Christian religion believes that God is not one but three, Father, Son and the Holy Ghost. Jesus Christ is the only Son of God and he is creator and everlasting like his father, although the Bible says that Jesus ate and drank, slept and woke and was dependent on water, air and everything that a human being requires and had in him all human wants. If God is also dependent on all things like man, then how can He be fit to be God and what difference remains between God and man? The Quran has clearly declared that those who call Christ God or Son of God assign partners to Allah and are unbelievers. Christians by making Christ son of God are traducing God. The Quran has taught that Christ, like Moses, David, Solomon, Job, Hud, Noah and other Prophets, was an apostle and prophet and just a man and created and not creator. Now think yourself how clear and acceptable is this declaration of the Holy Quran and how the Christian creed is complicated and unacceptable.

"(3) According to Islam, every man is born pure and free from sins and on attaining maturity, others lead him astray. Further, Allah has given man the capacity to obey the laws of Allah and avoid prohibited things. The Quran says that Adam did not commit any sin and all Prophets were innocent and free from sins, and so the question of inherited sin is satan's invention. The Christian creed, on the other hand, says that every man is a sinner, born so much so that even Prophets committed sins and Adam's sin has made all men sinful. It is obvious that this belief is illogical, unnatural and contrary to the evidence of intuition that while Adam commits sin (which is also not proved) all humanity suffers punishment for it. So in this respect also the teaching of the Quran is just and right and its decision is logical, natural and according to the usage of Prophets.

"(4) The emphasis which the Quran lays on conduct and on the sublimity and superiority of morals is not found in any other religion. Islam says that man will succeed by his own efforts and will be rewarded by his own good actions. It says that this was the teaching of all Prophets (see Surah Najm, Section 6).

"No one can bear the burden of another, but every man will be responsible for his own actions. It is this chaste teaching which gives man the lesson of nobility and urges him to do good.

"On the other hand, the Christian teaching is that Jesus Christ, taking the load of the sins of all sinners, was crucified and he atoned for the sins of all. Sins were committed by thousands and millions of men but punishment was given to an innocent person, the only Son of God! This teaching, on the one hand, makes man worthless and insolent and, on the other hand, one loses confidence in oneself, and so his worth and value fall in his own eyes. Further, this creed is a great derogation of God's Holiness.

' "(5) When the Quran came to the world, it revealed all the truths, the truths which had been long forgotten; even their sources were polluted. Islam re established the nobility of all Prophets and refuted the false allegations made against them. It exposed man's interpolation made in their revealed books and clarified the reality by this exposition. Islam refuted false and base-less charges against Prophet Jesus which some enemies and false friends had made against him, and it is in fact the beneficence of Islam that it represented Prophet Jesus in his true colour and cleared him of the accusations of the Jews and the so-called Christians.

"As against this Christians have accused the Prophets with falsehood, fornication and murder and presented the character of Christ also in such a mutilated form that if Islam on its advent had not clarified the truth" no one would have taken him even as a man of morals. This is an obligation of Islam which Christians can never repay. Christians not only manipulated their books but also compiled hundreds of Bibles in the name of Christ. Today the same compiled, fraudulent and false Bibles are put before us which do not have the remotest concern with Christ. The Quran claims that all revealed books have been fully and completely preserved in it. So I invite you and all Christians to this Quran which maintains the honour of Christianity in the world and which presents to us all at a time the teachings of all Prophets.

"(6) Islam specifies the rights of women, issues orders for the liberation of slaves, infuses the spirit of equality and brotherhood among mankind and establishes contact between man and God.

"But in Christianity there is not even a hint at women's rights. Only men have been told that they can divorce their wives on adultery but said nothing as to what the wife could do on husband's going bad. There is not a word of liberation of slaves in Christianity.

"(7) Islam fertilised human morals and provided a regular code of conduct for humanity. By following it man can utilise moderately his inner faculties. The Holy Quran says (see Part 2 5, Section 4): 'The return of evil is evil, but who forgives for the sake of reforming them, its reward and credit is with God.'

"But Christianity emphasises only one aspect if it that the offender may not be punished, but if anyone strikes on one cheek the other cheek should also be presented to him. How

can anyone in the world follow this teaching and how can world order be maintained by it? If it were the intention to show mercy and kindness on every occasion, then why did He create the quality of anger in man and then why did He allow His part of human instinct to wither away. "These are a few points as an illustration on

understanding. I have accepted Islam and so for you also if there is any straight path it is only one, that is you should accept Islam at the earliest and express penitence on such multiplication of Divinity in Christianity which are contrary to all qualities of God and an obstacle in the path of human progress. May God grant you the privilege of accepting the truth ! I am also praying for your right guidance and may God give it to you soon! Amen !

"Your servant, Isabella."

## **Duty of Islamic Government**

The Muslims had learnt the details of the secret meeting which was convened by Christians and that Isabella's letter had cooled down all their ambitions. After four or five days in the company of Ziad b. Umar eminent exponents of Islam and divines assembled. Isabella and her friends were also present there when one of them "said.

A person: Respected sir! the Christians have been secretly trying to defraud Isabella and reconvert her to Christianity, but the Muslim government has not taken any action in this respect so far. When Isabella has become a Muslim it is the duty of the Muslim government to release her from the clutches of Christians, but it did not do that. Even now Christians are' doing mischief but the Muslim government is taking no action against them.

Ziad b. Umar: All the efforts of the Christians have so far been secret, so how could the Muslim government take cognizance of it? Then there is another thing. It is true that when anyone becomes a Muslim it is the duty of the Muslim government to protect him from the oppression of the non-Muslims and stand by anyone openly declaring Islam. But we deliberately prevented the Muslim government from taking such action for we thought the persecution suffered by Isabella and her friends will make them used to suffer troubles in the path of truth and their belief and faith will be put to the test. If we wanted we would have openly released Isabella from their clutches.

The same man: But for the future, the Christians should have been warned to refrain from doing this in the case of anyone else.

Ziad b. Umar: You need not worry. In future the government will be more active to support freedom of conscience. In this connection we have informed Christian priests about all the details of Isabella and her whereabouts and told them that we do not in the least want to conceal Isabella as the government is responsible to take action against anyone trying to make her an apostate and that if they took any action in future against Isabella they will be liable to answer before the government.

Umar Lahmi: Respected sir, Isabella's friends request that they may be taught the tenets of Islam and converted to Islam.

Ziad b. Umar : Well, do it in the name of Allah and convert them.

Umar Lahmi: Have Mirano, Mertha and Hanana any doubt about any tenet of Islam? Mirano for her own satisfaction wants to clarify some points. We do not want to stop her from further inquiry and not to answer her questions.

Ziad b. Umar : Very well. Ask Mirano to put up questions and I depute you to answer her.

Mirano: Respected sir, first let us be converted to Islam and then I will ask one or two questions just because I wish I could give silencing answer to Christians. God forbid! I do not have the least doubt in my mind about Islam.

Then the three girls were converted to Islam and all those present congratulated them and after accepting Islam they covered their faces while Mirano proceeded to ask her questions.

Mirano: According to the Christians, Taurat is the law and Bible the perfection. Obviously after the law and perfection there is no need of anything else, so the Quran was also not needed. Since the Quran has confirmed Taurat and the Bible, the objection gains further strength.

Umar Lahmi: If Christians attribute certain qualities to their books, how does it become necessary to believe that they are actually so ? This claim must be proved by argument. But taking for granted that Taurat is the law and Bible the perfection, then the Quran is the preserver. As a preserver the Quran covers both the law and the perfection. The word preserver the Quran itself has used. It says in Surah Maidah (v.), verse 48 : "(O Prophet!) this Book (the Quran) has been revealed to you with the Truth which confirms previous books and is their preserver." But the Bible, never uses the word perfection for itself. It is thus proved that the Quran covers both the law and the perfection.

Mirano: The Taurat and the Bible have been mentioned in the Quran and it is necessary for every Muslim to accept them. Then why do not the Muslims believe in them?

Umar Lahmi: Because Christians do not have the real Taurat and Bible with them.

Mirano: If Taurat and Bible do not exist, why does the Quran confirm them ?

Umar Lahmi: The Quran has confirmed the original Taurat and Bible and not these forged and manufactured ones.

Mirano: Christians say that these are the very Taurat and Bible which the Quran confirms.

Umar Lahmi: Well, now I will ask the Quran itself whether it confirms the existing Taurat and Bible or considers them false. The Quran says that Allah is one Who created the earth and the sky . . . and was not fatigued in creating them. But Taurat says that God created everything in six days and on the seventh day he rested.! Rest is taken by one who is fatigued So by Taurat it is proved that God fatigued, but the Quran says Allah is never fatigued. Now say whether the Quran confirmed or rejected the previous books. The Taurat says that the Prophet Solomon worshipped idols, but the Quran says Solomon never committed unbelief. Now is it confirmation or rejection of Taurat ? Now take the Bible. In all the four Bibles it is said that Jesus Christ died crying on the cross, that he was actually crucified, but the Quran says that the Jews neither killed nor crucified Christ. Then the Bible says that Jesus Christ claimed to be God, but the Quran

says that those who call Jesus son of Mary God are rejectors. Now let any Christian priest say with justice whether the Quran confirmed or rejected the Bible.

Mirano: No doubt, it is proved from the Quran that It does not confirm the existing Taurat and Bible but rejects them.

Umar Lahmi: It is now clear that the Quran does not at all confirm the existing Taurat and Bible but rejects them strongly and has called their statements and facts and beliefs as assigning partners to God and apostasy. Now I am giving a general principle from the Quran by which every book can be tested, as if the Holy Quran had given us a touchstone by which we can judge every book. The Quran says that if the Quran were not from Allah you would have found in it many contradictions. This verse of the Holy Quran asserts that except the Book of Allah no other book is free from contradictions, because man is not immune from errors and lapses and howsoever care a man takes in writing a book there must be some contradictions in it and a book which has contradictions cannot be from Allah, otherwise Allah will be taken to be committing lapses and lies. Can anyone dispute this principle?

Mirano: The principle is quite just and natural. Surely any book containing contradictions cannot be from perfect God. But are there contradictions in Taurat and Bible?

Umar Lahmi: Many, so many that the reader's mind is puzzled. Now I test Christian books by this principle so that you may also see reality. Now, sister Mirano, tell me what is your age.

Mirano : Between twenty-one and twenty-two, say twenty-two.

Umar Lahmi: Very good. Now if you say that your age is twenty-two and an hour later that it is forty-two. Will both the statements be correct?

Mirano: How can both be correct? My statement that my age is forty-two will be quite wrong, twenty-two will be correct.

Umar Lahmi: Now, see it is written in 2 Chronicles 21:20. that Ahaziah's age was thirty-two when she was enthroned, but in 2 Kings 8 :26 it is written that at the time that Ahaziah began to rule her age was twenty-two. Can both these statements be correct?

Mirano : Never, one of them will be correct and the other wrong.

Umar Lahmi: Now the question which of the statements is correct can never be solved and so both the books of the Bible have become doubtful and the seal of falsehood is affixed to both. Now see further. It is written in 2 Samuel 24:9 that there were eight lakhs of Israelites and five lakhs of Jews who took up swords, but in 1 Chronicles 5: 1'8 it is written that Israelites were eleven lakhs and Jews 440700. Now say if both the figures are correct.

Mirano : Never, one of them is incorrect.

Umar Lahmi: And can the book which gives such incorrect figures be from God?

Mirano: Never, God forbid ! God protect, fie, fie ! God's honour is damaged by this and so it is better not to attribute them to God.

Umar Lahmi: Now, see further. It is written in 2 Kings 24 : 8 that at the time of coronation Jehoiachin was only of eighteen years. As if coronation was a miracle that his age was at the same time eight and eighteen. In the presence of these contradictions, can anyone call Taurat and the Psalms revelations from God ? Can (Allah forbid!) such inaccuracy be attributed to God ?

Mirano : Subhan Allah (Glory to God)! These are such patent arguments of unreliability of Christian Books which cannot be explained away. Even a child can understand it as two and two are four.

Umar Lahmi: In 2 Samuel 23 : 8 it is written about an incident that Adino the Eznite killed eight hundred enemies and against this in 1 Chronicles 11:11 it is written about the same incident that he killed only three hundred, and, strangely, both are about the same incident. In 2 Samuel 24:13 it is said : "Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land ?" but in 1 Chronicles it is said that the famine would be sent for three years. Probably in those days, there was no difference between the figures three and seven, as Christians did not discriminate between one and three Gods!

Those present: Surely, it looks like this.

Mirano : It is strange that Christians did not notice such errors.

Umar Lahmi: They could notice these errors if they had made enquiries and had resolved to reject inaccurate statements and confirm what is correct. But they hold on to these errors as one would adhere to the truth. And see in 1 Kings 4:46 where it is written that there were forty thousand stables for horses and carriages of Prophet Solomon and twelve thousand horsemen, but against this in 2 Chronicles 9 :25 it is written that there were just four thousand stables for horses and carriages of Prophet Solomon. Is there no difference between four thousand and forty thousand ? One book says forty thousand and the other book deducts thirty-six thousand from it and is contented with just four thousand, and what is strange is that both the books are regarded as revealed and from God. Did the Quran say it wrongly that there can be no contradictions in a book of God?

Isabella: Subhan Allah (Glory to God)! How great is the Quran! If this book had not come Christian books would have never been shown in their true colours.

Umar Lahmi: Now just see another interesting reference. It is written in 2 Samuel 10:18 that Prophet David cut down men of seven hundred carriages and forty thousand horsemen. Just keep in mind the figures of seven hundred and forty thousand horsemen.



But against this it is written in I Chronicle 19:18 that Prophet David cut down seven thousand men mounted on carriages and forty thousand footmen. Both the books are said to be revealed and from God and both are supposed to be from men's manipulation and Satan's interloping, but one book says men on seven hundred carriages and the other book says seven thousand men on carriages and forty thousand footmen, not horsemen. These books are said to be revealed and it is to these books that Muslims are called. Are these the books which God revealed to Prophets?

Mirano : Fie, fie! so many contradictions in these books! God forbid! How can they be accepted in Islam? The fact is that so thick curtains are drawn against the wisdom, conscience and love of unbelief that they do not see while they have eyes and do not hear while they have ears. May Allah give them guidance!

Umar Lahmi: So much about contradictions of Taurat and Old Testament which can admit no compromise. Now let us have a look at the Bibles. It appears after careful consideration that the condition of all the existing four Bibles is worse still. In the first place the Bibles were composed and written in different languages. The Bibles which were in olden times regarded as divine revelation are today regarded as apocryphal (of doubtful origin) and, instead of these, other Bibles came into use. As if Bibles were just school text-books which could be changed at will according to prevailing conditions and a new series of text-books introduced. Besides, different Bibles were used at the same time, such as the Bibles of the Eastern Church are different from the Bibles of the Western Church. Councils were held at various times in which different Bibles were chosen as if God's revelation and word is dependent on the judgment of the Church.

Mirano: Yes, I also once heard from my father. (Michael) that in one of the Councils some of the revealed books were excluded from the list of revealed books.

Umar Lahmi: Now let us test the Bibles on the Quran and its principles and standard so that the unstability and unreliability of Bibles may be established. It is written in the Book of Matthew 27 : 3-8 that a disciple of Christ (Judas) taking a bribe of thirty pieces of silver surrendered Jesus Christ to the government and when (God forbid!) Jesus Christ was killed on the cross, Judas was very repentant and went to the chief of fortune-tellers and left after throwing the thirty silver pieces before them and committed suicide on reaching home. But in the Bible of Acts it is written that Judas purchased a field with the bribe money and, while he was going to this field, stumbled and his entrails came out. In the first Bible it was said that Judas returned the thirty pieces to the chief of fortune-tellers and committed suicide on returning home, while the Bible of Acts says that Judas purchased a field with the bribe money and while going to it he stumbled there and his entrails came out.

These are two different statements of the different Bibles both of which are accepted as revealed by Christians, and the Holy Ghost got them written according to revelation. That is when the Holy Ghost went to the author of the Book of Matthew he dictated one thing, and something quite different when he went to the author of Acts. Now either you should take the Holy Ghost as a liar and cheat or refuse to take the books as revealed. It is,

however, preferable that, instead of accusing the Holy Ghost, you should declare all these Bibles as forged and false, otherwise neither God nor the Holy Ghost can be exonerated from evils.

Mirano: Obviously it is the existing Bibles which are forged and false and the enemies of Christ have forged them to serve their ends.

Umar Lahmi: This was the contradiction of two different Bibles, but let us see the contradiction in one and the same Bible. The story of the conversion to Christianity of Saint Paul, who, inventing the creed of Trinity, made all Christians guilty of assigning partners to God, is mentioned in three places in the Book of Acts and all the three are different. How strange that (God forbid!) the Holy Ghost lies at three places in the same book about the same incident. In chapter 9 verse 3 of the Book of Acts it is written that Saint Paul was going somewhere with his companions when he saw a light in the heaven and heard a voice on which he fell on the ground, but the companions remained standing. The companions heard the voice but did not see anything, while in chapter 22, verse 4 of the same book it is written that the companions saw the light but did not hear the voice and in the same Bible, chapter 26, verse 13, it is written that Saint Paul and all his companions fell on the ground. Now just fancy in one Bible three lies have been told about the same incident at three places. Can all these three be correct?

Mirano: Never. All the three are false and if anyone is correct it cannot be specified.

Umar Lahmi: You have seen contradictions in two different Bibles and contradictions in the same Bible. Now see the wonder of contradiction in one and the same verse. In Luke, chapter 21, verse 16, Jesus says to his disciples that men will kill them and drive them out of their homes but they will not be able to injure them in the least. It means that enemies will kill the disciples but would not cause any injury, as if killing is not contradictory of not causing any injury. One may wonder whether the compilers of Bibles had any sense. In one and the same verse there is such a ridiculous contradiction.

Isabella: After all, how do the unlucky Christians explain this ?

Umar Lahmi: What explanation can they give ? They evade the question by irrelevant talk and attribute the error to the copyist. This does not lessen the importance of the matter. Even if this answer is taken for granted the question remains as to what the real passage was and which are the errors of the copyist? For instance, the age of a person is said to be twenty-two years and forty-two years at one and the same time; which of them is the copyist's error and what is the correct figure ? No Christian can say now that the real passage was this but the copyist made it thus. And when the copyist's error cannot be located, then the explanation and the reply are nonsense. So it proves that even according to Christians these books are suspicious. When at one place the copyist's error has been admitted, there could be no belief or faith in the whole book.

Isabella : Is it not possible to correct these errors of the copyist's by a comparison with the original?

Umar Lahmi: Had the original books been available, why should have there been all this trouble? Original books do not exist; only the translations from translations and copies from copies are relied upon. And what is more strange is that it has not yet been ascertained about these Bibles as to when they were written or who were their authors. Some say that the original Bibles were written in the Greek language which was current in Palestine at that time. Some say they were written both in the Greek and the Hebrew languages. But in whatever languages they were written they should have been available, but they are not found anywhere ; the translations from translations cannot be trusted. Then there is also the difference of opinion about the period during which they were written, nor is anything known about their authors. Some say that the Disciple Jonah wrote his own Bible and some say it was written by another person whose name was also Jonah. What is worse is that there is no internal evidence in the books about their authors; in the Bible of Matthew his name is mentioned in absentia.

Mirano: Christians say that whichever books have been certified by the Church they alone are Books of God and revealed ones.

Umar Lahmi: So for the book to be taken as revealed we have to depend on the Church and the books themselves are deaf and dumb.

Isabella: Christians assert that the decision of the Church is free from errors and so their decision is also revealed.

Umar Lahmi: If the decisions of the Church are free from error, why then are there differences in the decisions of different Churches. In the Council of Nice held in Constantinople some of the Books were treated as revealed ; these were excluded from the revealed books by the Councils of Trent and Philadelphia, while some books which were excluded from the list of revealed books were again included in the revealed books by the Council of Trent. As if the revealed books are noses of wax which may be turned to any side.

After this meeting the participants dispersed. Arrangements were made for the training of Isabella and her friends and they all devoted themselves in acquiring religious knowledge. Four years later all the girls began to speak Arabic fluently and gained direct knowledge about Islam. Isabella after some time became the refuge of women of Cordova after acquiring religious knowledge. She became a model of Islamic injunctions and she was taken as a Muhaddithah (Traditionist) in Cordova as she became an expert in the knowledge of Traditions and the related matters and she continued to advance in piety, prayerfulness and attachment to Allah, and many women were benefited by her vast learning.

## **A White Lie**

The light of guidance of Islam is the greatest boon of Allah which He confers from His unknown treasure on whomsoever He likes. Isabella is the daughter of a great Christian priest, was a strict Christian herself and a scholar of Christian theology, but now she is a Muslim saint, a traditionist, a devotee and a perfectly disciplined Muslim lady. Eminent Muslim divines and jurists are proud of being her disciples and she is famed all over Spain for her learning and piety. She could solve at a moment's notice the most complicated problems of Muslim law.

She had been a Muslim for ten years and in this period the attacks of Christians had subsided. Hundreds of Christian men and women got right guidance of Islam through her and by Allah's grace she won laurels in many learned discussions.

Just at that time the news spread that a Christian woman of Toledo was highly learned in the Quran and the Traditions and earlier revealed books and she had such convincing arguments on the truth of Christianity that even the greatest divine could not refute. Besides, the fame of her miracles gave her a position among Christians which even the Pope did not enjoy. Christian men and women from far-off places came to touch her apparel to acquire blessings and it was said that she cured the most dangerous diseases just by her look. This woman knew that Isabella had accepted Islam ten years ago; she publicly proclaimed that if Isabella came to her she would reconvert her to Christianity by her miracles and force of her arguments, but said that Isabella would never come to her as during the last ten years she must have known the "fraud" which made her to give up Christian religion. This proclamation again created a stir all over Spain and Christians started mischief-making. At last one day in her study circle a learned man addressed her.

The learned man : Have you heard of a new proclamation ?

Isabella: What is it ?

The learned man: A Christian woman has challenged you to debate and has proclaimed that in the first place you will not come to her, and if you came she will not leave you without reconverting you to Christianity both by her miracles and arguments.

Isabella: La haula wala quvvata ilia billah [All power and authority is with Allah]! A Christian woman and her assumption that she can convert a true Muslim to Christianity by her arguments! In fact, I have lost interest in such things. It seems that this Christian woman is greedy of fame.

The learned man : She has her fame since long, but now she aspires to confront you. There is a talk of it all over the city and Christians.. .. Isabella, this is what I have heard that she is very learned and scholarly and Christians even claim that no Muslim divine can beat her in the knowledge of the Quran and the Traditions. Isabella : Very good. If she is fond of con-frontation, let her come here with her associates and ask any question she wants.

On the sixth day after this Isabella received a letter from this woman which said: "Will you have a talk with me on Islam and Christianity? If you allow me to come to you I will gladly try to resolve your doubts." Isabella wrote in reply: "Not for idle talk or wasting of time but for search of truth, you are welcome to my house at any time." Immediately on getting Isabella's reply the Christian woman made it known publicly and next day with about a hundred Christian women she came to Isabella's house which was in fact a centre of Quranic studies. Isabella cordially welcomed all guests and the talk was initiated by the Christian woman.

Christian woman: It is said that you gave up Lord Jesus and all the saints and accepted a spurious religion like Islam. It is better that after having this experience you come back to Christianity.

Isabella : Even if anyone burns me alive I cannot give up Islam, nor can I accept multi-divinity and shameful creed of Christianity, yet I have a right to ask why you have come here to invite me to Christianity. It is nowhere written in your Bible to invite other communities to Christianity; on the other hand, it is written there that Jesus Christ was the Prophet of Israelites (Jews) only and he was sent to preach to them alone.

Christian woman : But is it written in the Bible that the doors of Christian religion be closed to humanity ? Is this your research that made you renounce Christianity?

Isabella : Yes, it is written in the Bible and is also proved by the Quran which says : *Wa Rasulan ila Bani Isra'il*, that (Jesus Christ) was sent as an apostle to the Israelites (Jews), and at another place : *Waj'alnahu mithlan Bani Isra'il* [And We have made Jesus Christ a model for the Israelites (not for the whole world)].

Christian woman : We do not believe in the Quran ; why do you put it to me ?

Isabella : I mentioned the Quran because you may know that in this matter the Quran and the Bible are one. Now listen ! It is written in the Book of Matthew 10 : 5 : "These twelve Jesus sent forth and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles and into the city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Look, it has been proved from your Bibles also that Jesus Christ did not come as a prophet for us but only for the Israelites and it is better for you to obey your Lord. To convert us to Christianity is to act against the injunction of your Lord and to rebel against him.

Christian woman : What do you know about the Bible ? Ask from me the meaning of these verses. Is it not written in the Bible that the Bible may be proclaimed everywhere ?

Isabella : Not at all !

Christian woman : Do not speak a white lie, Isabella. At least before this assembly you should refrain from lies. See, it is written in Mark 16:15= 16: "And he said unto them, Go

ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth shall be saved." Look, how clear is the injunction to make all the world Christian.

Isabella: These are verses 15 and 16 of chapter 16. Probably you do not know that the real Bible ended at verse 8 only and the remaining twelve verses are later additions. So you cannot put forth in argument this manipulated gospel.

Christian woman : How do you know that these verses are later additions?

Isabella : From the researches of Christians themselves, for by comparison with older copies it was found that twelve verses of the last chapter were not in the earlier copies. [In the Urdu edition of the Bible this manipulation is indicated in the margin.]

Christian woman : As we do not have original copies of the Bible I cannot say anything in reply. Let me consult the original copies. But just what teaching of the Quran is not in the Bible ? Then why did you accept Islam ?

Isabella : On this subject I had had detailed discussion with the priests. So you just enquire from them and then ask this question.

Christian woman : How do I know what reply you gave to the priests. But just tell me what superiority you found in Islam. Tell me any superiority of Islam.

Isabella : Do you think I accepted Islam with eyes closed ? At least there is something which made me disgusted with Christianity and made me a lover of Islam.

Christian woman : Why do you not mention the superiority of Islam ? In fact, there is no superiority in it. Look here, Isabella ! There is no one in Spain equal to me in learning and you have not the least inkling of things that I know. Anyway, I am asking you just one question which will make clear the truth and untruth like the bright day. Just tell me which of the qualities of justice is superior to the law of grace or the law of grace is superior to the creed of justice.

Isabella : Both are superior in their proper places and defective when out of place.

Christian woman : Did you understand what I said ? Look ! the law of Taurat is justice as in this punishment is specified for every transgression, but the Bible is the law of grace in which only Lord Jesus Christ has been specified as atonement for sins. Now, say if you reject the law of grace.

Isabella : I have already said that both are correct in their proper places. If any transgressor is forgiven with a view that he will reform himself, then forgiveness and grace will be followed, but if it is feared that the transgressor will be emboldened in transgression and even then he is forgiven, then this forgiveness will be criminal and injustice to the transgressor.

Christian woman : Now just say whether the Quran is the law of justice or of grace.

Isabella : According to your view, Taurat is the law of justice and not of grace, while the Bible is the law of grace and not of justice. So both of them are defective in their places, while the Quran covers both justice and grace and has taught correct ways of the use of both. For instance, the Quran says that "the return of evil is evil." This is the law of justice. It further says that "if anyone forgives and there is better in it, then he will be rewarded" (xlii. 40). This is the law of grace.

At another place it says : "If you have been wronged, then retaliate according to the wrong done." This is justice and : *Walan sabartum fa huwa khairul Sabirin* [If you be patient, then that is also good for those who are patient]. This is grace. At a third place it says: *Wa in kana dhu 'usratin fa naziratin ila maisaratin* [If the debtor is in strained circumstances then give him time till it is easy for him to repay (ii. 280)]. This is justice. But *Wa in tasaddaqu khairul lakum* [If you forgo it, this is better for you (ii. 280)]. This is grace. Thus the Quran comprehends both justice and grace.

Christian woman : The Quran orders retaliation but the Bible prohibits retaliation and orders forgiveness. Thus the superiority of the Bible has been proved.

Isabella : It does not prove superiority but a defect. If mischief-makers and criminals are forgiven on every occasion, mischief will spread in the world and order of the world will be disrupted, but the Quran has allowed the use of both, forgiveness and retaliation, in their proper places. Besides, the teaching of the Bible also casts aspersion on God as to why He created the quality of anger and excitement in men. Has the quality of anger been created uselessly? Never. God has never created any of the capabilities of men without merit. So the Quran has taught proper use of the qualities of mercy and anger and forgiveness and retaliation and does not allow any branch of human capabilities to wither away.

Christian Woman : Look ! how unjust it is that you are rejecting every good quality of ours. Our Lord never fought with anyone but forgave his enemies and bore their oppression patiently, while your Prophet took revenge from his enemies and never forgave anyone. Thus it is proved that it is the example of the Bible and our Lord which will lead to salvation.

Isabella: Patience, forgiveness, firmness, bravery and justice, etc., are such qualities whose merits are known to every man but few of them know their real significance. Every moral quality is good or bad according to its use in its proper place, otherwise in themselves patience and forgiveness, etc., have no merit. Look, forgiveness and overlooking will be at their best when the forgiver has the power to retaliate. If a helpless and weak person has no power to retaliate, his overlooking and forgiveness will not be considered a merit but just his helplessness. Our Prophet possessed this moral power of forgiveness and overlooking in the highest degree. Thus when after the victory of Mecca cruel unbelievers were brought to him he let them free, saying : *La tasriba alaikum al-*

yauma [There is no charge against you today]. Although if he wanted he could have cut them to pieces, because he was in power and his Companions awaited his orders. Now, tell me what was the position when your Lord forgave his enemies. Obviously he was oppressed, had no one to help him nor had he the power to take revenge ; what else could he do but to forgive? If he were in power and then had forgiven his enemies it would have been a matter of pride for you. Patience in the state of helplessness is not at all forgiveness.

Christian woman : Fie ! Isabella, you call sanguinary men moral and do not give any merit to the person who never shed a drop of blood.

Isabella: It is your faulty understanding that you take obvious things in perverse light. I now put it to you. Do you see any good in bravery and whether you regard justice good or bad ?

Christian woman : Both these qualities are excellent ; who can deny it ?

Isabella: Very good. Now, tell me if the quality of bravery can be manifested except in battle and justice can be at its best without the establishment of a government. Never ! Thus Allah had provided both these opportunities to our sacred Prophet. That is, he waged war against non-believers and also acquired the ruling power so that on the occasion of fighting, his quality of bravery is manifested and with the establishment of a government the quality of justice comes to the fore. Can you show both these qualifications in your Lord ?

Christian woman: You think fighting is also a great merit. Our Lord brought the message of peace and security and not of fighting.

Isabella : But in our Prophet both these qualities were combined. On the one hand he was a mercy for the worlds and kind and forgiving and on the other hand a champion fighter in the cause of Allah, so that he may be an example and good model in all aspects of life.

Christian woman : How perverse is your talk, Isabella? Can you compare favourably a fighting man with a man of peace ?

Isabella : If fighting the enemies and sup-pressing their mischief is a great crime, then what do you say about Prophet Moses, whole lif« was spent in fighting against enemies and of which the Old Testament is witness ? It is true that Jesus Christ was an apostle of peace and security and he never fought in his life. But our Prophet was an Apostle of Dignity as well as of Grace. If on the one hand he fought against enemies like Moses, on the other hand, like Christ, he gave the message of peace and security to the world. Thus he was the most perfect example of both Prophets Moses and Jesus.

Christian woman: It seems that you have become very clever, but I will not leave you till I have defeated you completely. I want to talk to you frankly so that all the women present here may follow it as two and two make four. Just think after comparing the Quran and the Bible so that the truth becomes quite clear to you at once.



Isabella: I will promptly answer whatever question you ask.

Christian woman : Look here, unless the apostleship of your Prophet is proved all this talk is useless. First you prove the truth and prophethood of Prophet Muhammad and then the talk may proceed.

Isabella : What is the test of Prophethood according to you ?

Christian woman: If you can prove two things about Prophet Muhammad, then Islam is true, otherwise false. Firstly, that some previous Prophet has foretold about him and, secondly, that he should have performed miracles. For every Prophet these two things are essential.

Isabella : Was Adam a Prophet according to you?

Christian woman : Why not ?

Isabella : Did any previous Prophet foretell about him ?

Christian woman : There was no Prophet before him, so how could anyone have foretold about him?

Isabella : So your criterion is obviously wrong and mischievous that it is necessary for every Prophet that some previous Prophet should have foretold about him, otherwise Adam would be excluded from Prophethood. As to the performance of miracles, that is also not necessary for prophethood, as it is written in your own Bible, that false prophets will perform greater miracles than Jesus.

Christian woman : You do not agree to anything. After all, will you prove the Prophethood of your Prophet or not ?

Isabella : This is the very question I am asking you. On what ground Christians believed in Prophets Moses, David, Solomon, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Noah, Abraham ? Just let me hear that argument and on the same ground, Inshallah (God willing), the Prophethood of the Last Apostle will be proved to your entire satisfaction and you shall have no reason to reject.

Christian woman : We have accepted every Prophet by his acts.

Isabella : What acts! Just give their details so that there remains no difficulty in establishing the basis of argument.

Here the Christian woman became thoughtful keeping her head bowed for a long time, while the women present there felt that it was difficult for her to escape the strong grip of Isabella and that she would certainly become the cause of humility and degradation of the Christians. Then the Christian woman raised her head and spoke.

Christian woman : We do not know about other Prophets, we are only concerned with our Lord Jesus Christ and through him we believe in all Prophets.

Isabella: So you should come forward with the criterion of the truth of your Lord so that on the same criterion the Prophethood of Muhammad may be proved.

Christian woman : The greatest proof of the Prophethood of our Lord is that he revived the dead, gave sight to the blind, cured the leper and saved people from the grip of Satan.

Isabella : What is the proof that your Lord did all this ? Where are those dead whom Jesus Christ revived? Where do those blind and lepers live whom your Lord gave sight and cured ? As against this I present to you a miracle of our beloved Prophet which is as alive today as it was in his lifetime and will live for ever. This is the miracle of the Holy Quran which challenged the whole world, that, if it is the invention of the Prophet's mind, to bring forth any such work: just ten verses, a few verses, only one verse like it, but so far no Christian, no Jew, no idol-worshipper, nor anyone else has taken up the challenge. This is the living miracle which will keep helpless the whole world till the Day of Judgment. As against this the miracles of other Prophets were transitory, timely and made to die out, of which there is no proof except hearsay.

Christian woman : You have started irrelevant talk. Can such a book be a miracle which orders four marriages? Look here! our Lord had said that he was the path of truth and life and without him no one could reach God, the Father.

Isabella : The Quran never ordered four marriages. It has just given permission for it under certain conditions. But if multiple marriages are any crime what would you say about Prophet David and Solomon who, according to Old Testament, had hundreds of wives ? As to your Lord saying that he was the path of truth and life, how can this be a refutation of the Quran? Every Prophet came to the world with the path of truth and life. Your Lord said that he was the path of truth and life, but the Quran says about our Prophet that not only he was on the right path but he also showed the path of truth to others : "Innaka la-tahdi ila siratin mustaqim" [Surely thou guidest to the right path (xliiii. 52)}. The Quran says our Prophet was not only himself life but he came to give life to the world : "Ya ayyuhalladhina amanustajibu lillah wa lir Rasuli idha da'akum lima yuhyikum" [O ye who believe, when Allah and His Apostle call you then you should respond to the call so that he may give you life (viii. 24)].

The proof of it is that the Holy Prophet converted the barbarians, cruel, oppressive, ignorant, thieves, murderers, adulterers and idolators into moral, Allah-worshippers and pious men and hundreds of thousands of Companions flocked to his standard. That is, he gave life to the Arabs in his very lifetime. As against this, your Lord made just twelve Disciples in his whole life and even to them he did not give full life, as Christ himself called some of them dishonest, some accursed and some thieves.

Christian woman : You talk a lot, but so far you have not proved what miracle your Prophet performed.

Isabella : My advice to you is that you give up logical talk but try to convince me by your miracle, as your miracles are widely known and people come to take your blessing from long distances. You are not apt in logical talk.

Christian woman : You are not competent enough that miracles may be performed before you.

## **Islam, the Perfect and True Religion**

Isabella did not say anything after this and all those present were struck dumb. The Christian women put their heads down in humility, while Muslims seemed to be pleased in their minds. The Christian woman herself sat silent and found no word to say. When Isabella noticed her helplessness she spoke again.

Isabella : Well, you must be tired now. Let us put off the discussion till tomorrow. Now, say at what time will you be able to come?

Christian woman : I will not rise without finally deciding about truth and falsehood right now. But probably you are tired.

Isabella : From me you are at ease to continue the talk day and night and do not go till truth and falsehood are sorted out. What I said was for your convenience.

Christian woman : In fact, I am resolved to carry the discussion till the last point. Now, just say what was the need of Islam when Christianity prevailed.

Isabella: If Islam had not come, truth would not have been brought here to the world. It was Islam which revived the teachings of Apostles and taught people purity and cleanness/ I tell you briefly a few reasons for the coming of Islam :

(1) Islam by its advent perfected religion, for teaching of previous revealed Books were suited for their own time and had no universal appeal. The Quran filled the gap.

(2) True teachings of Prophets were corrupted by their followers which the Quran purified. For instance, Christians, by deifying Jesus Christ, had built up the rotten structure of assigning partners to Allah which was pulled down first. Islam brought the light of the sun of God's unity and presented the true form of God's Glory and Mercy to the world.

(3) Ahl-i-Kitab (People of the Book) had attributed many shameful acts to Prophets, calling some of them liars, cheats and adulterers and thus making all Prophets sinners. Islam strongly refuted these charges and restored the real nobility and dignity of Prophets.

(4) Ahl-i-Kitab (People of the Book), by inter-pretting their sacred Books, had manipulated them and so people's trust on all revealed Books was lost. The Quran exposed their mischief and fraud and presented all the real teachings of previous Books anew, and now we have no need of any other book as the Quran includes teachings of all the Books revealed to Prophets.

(5) Since previous Prophets and their revealed Books were for particular periods and particular people, so they did not contain laws which were needed by men till the last day. The gap was filled by the Quran and, after completing the code of religion,

proclaimed that needs of all humanity are served in it by which men will be benefited till the Day of Judgment.

Do you now realise why Islam came to the world ?

Christian woman : All these are mere claims without arguments, you neither mentioned any miracle of your Prophet nor proved his Prophet-hood. The question of his teachings comes after these problems are resolved.

Isabella : You asked me to say what was the need of the advent of Islam and I briefly narrated some of the needs. Now it is for you to meet these arguments. I have already given you the proof of miracles and have put up to you such a living miracle which can be seen by all the world today, that is, the Quran and its challenge. If the Quran is not the " Word of Allah, then bring just one verse to compare with it. But it is just this which the world could not accomplish. As to the Prophet being a Messenger of Allah its proof is in this very miracle. When not even one verse can be produced to compare with it, then it is established that it is the Word of Allah and the person who brought it can only be True Apostle of Allah. Another proof is that the Prophet, after his getting Prophethood, gave such a reform to the world and in his own lifetime made entire Arabia to bow before Allah. Can an example of this type be found in any false prophet? Just name even one fraudulent man who would have performed this great reforming task.

Christian woman : Whatever you say, your Prophet is not fit to be obeyed. How can a person who had shed blood all his life and married so many women be ever a reformer? Look at the purity of our Lord, that he never married all his life.

Isabella : Well, your lord was God and did not need married life, for it is man who needs marriage. As our Prophet was a human being like others, he contracted marriages. But just name any other Prophet who, in spite of being a human being, had not married.

Christian woman : The perfect man is one who is distinguished from others.

Isabella : But you believe your Lord to be God, Son of God.

Christian woman : But along with this our Lord was also a perfect man.

Isabella : Did he eat and drink ?

Christian woman : Why not? His eating and drinking was not in his capacity of God but in the capacity of man.

Isabella : Then, how was your Lord distinguished ? What is the definition of perfect man ?

Christian woman : The perfect man is one in whose obeying there is no difficulty.

Isabella : Quite right. Now, you yourself have clarified the point. How can a Christian who has wife and children follow his Lord in his home life ? Similarly, how can Christians who are fighting against Muslims and idolaters follow their Lord in military matters ?

Christian woman : Our Lord neither fought any battle nor married. So the question does not arise,

Isabella : You have defined perfect man as one in following whom no difficulty arises. But here a great difficulty has arisen, for a man with a wife and children has no model for him in your Lord because he remained unmarried all his life. In the same way for the man staking his life in a battle, for him Christ cannot be a model.

Christian woman (after some silence): Our Lord is the model for spiritual life. What concern he has with physical life ?

Isabella : Quite right, Jesus Christ can be a model in spiritual life and not in physical life. So for physical life another guide should be found. In this aspect your Lord is wanting. But the being who can be a model both for spiritual and physical life is only one. Man is neither only physical that he needs just a worldly guide. Just as man is a combination of spirit and body, he needs a guide who can rightly guide him in both the spheres of life and whose life can be a model in the whole life of man. There is no doubt that Prophet Moses' life was of Dignity, while the life of Jesus Christ was of Grace, but the life of the Last Prophet, Muhammad, was of Perfection. Just as his life was a model for the prayerful, pious and for sufi, so also for a man of the world, a merchant and even for a king, The Prophet Muhammad grazed goats in early life, then retired to the seclusion of the cave of Hira for meditation.

He traded in Syria, then married Khadijah and, taking to household life, preached from the top of mount Faran and in the lanes of Mecca, went to preach in Taif and among the tribes of Hejaz and suffered at the hands of enemies and opponents, served the starving people, looked after orphans and widows of the community, migrated from Mecca to Medina, made pacts with Jews of Medina, built mosques, settled disputes between parties, led prayers, delivered speeches at different places, trained armies in the battles of Badr and Uhud and led them as a commander, exhibited the highest military skill,- and then prayed at night and for so long a time that his feet swelled and cracked. So, in fact, all the ways and means and models of life's requirements are found in the sacred, perfect life of our Holy Prophet Muhammad. Just as for one who grazes goats as well as for a great trader his life is a model, so also for a preacher and for a traveller and an emigrant his sacred life is worth following, so also for a retired devotee he is a good guide and his teaching a model for worldly men of homely life.

And his teach-ing provides perfect regulations, for international life as also for the need of the dweller of forests. Just as his plan of work is a guide in the battlefield, so also he is a good model for people in the days of peace and security. In short, in household life, preaching, trading, leadership, sermonising and leading prayers, retired life, tending

cattle, formulating laws, ruling as king, and in happiness and mourning, marriage and divorce, life and death, teaching and training children and whatever tasks come in man's civilised life there is nothing for which there is not a model in the perfect life of the Prophet. Thus perfection of life and all embarrassing needs of life are found neither in the life of Prophet Moses, nor in Prophet Jesus. So in justice and honesty we are bound to say that the Last Prophet Muhammad embodies in him all spiritual and physical codes of human life and of glory as well as grace. Any man of the world who is in search of a correct plan of actions for this world or the next for him in all honesty there is no other course but to take cover under the vast and merciful shade of the Last of the Prophets, Muhammad, and his sacred and complete life, his code of conduct.

The entire assembly was struck dumb after this speech of Isabella and even the Christian woman with all her claim of performing miracles was entranced. When Isabella found the Christian woman sunk in humility and remorse, she apologised to all guests and said good-bye to them.

It is reported by Abu Hafs that the effect of this speech was that many of the Christian women present at the meeting accepted Islam and after some years even that Christian woman also accepted Islam at the truthful hands of Isabella. But it did not happen all at once ; it took a few years for the amenable souls to come under the shade of Divine Grace and Mercy.

So long as Isabella lived she continued to render magnificent services to Islam. On the one hand she silenced Christians and on the other hand poured an ocean of learning in traditions and interpretation of the Holy Quran, and thousands of Muslim divines were benefited by her learning. She lived up to the age of eighty. All Spain mourned her death and millions offered her funeral prayer.

**THE END**

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